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# THE CORNHILL



No. 999

Spring, 1984

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JOHN MURRAY, 50 ALBEMARLE STREET, LONDON, W.1

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

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JOHN VERNEY, painter and illustrator. His work is well known to readers of *The Young Elizabethan*. He is now working on a book, to be published by Collins, with the background of his nine years in the army.

LESLEY BLANCH, writer and traveller—wife of Romain Gary, French author and diplomat. Her first book *The Wilder Shores of Love* will be published later this year.

LUDOVIC KENNEDY won the Atlantic Award in Literature in 1950. Editor of *First Reading*, the literary magazine on the Third Programme. His recent books are *Nelson's Band of Brothers*, *One Man's Meat* (Longmans).

MARY VOYLE. Her book *Remaining a Stranger* came out last year and her new novel will be published this autumn by Heinemann.

LORD KINROSS, author, journalist and broadcaster. His published works include *Lords of the Equator* (Hutchinson), *The Orphaned Realm*; *Journeys in Cyprus* (Percival Marshall) written under the name of Patrick Balfour. Has travelled extensively in Middle Eastern countries and is now at work on a book on Turkey.

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With the Summer issue the CORNHILL will celebrate its 1000th number.

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At present the CORNHILL appears quarterly and will publish occasional Supplements containing work of up to 35,000 words in length. Subscriptions are available from any bookseller or from 50 Albemarle Street, London, W.1. A subscription for 4 issues costs 10s. 8d. and for 8 issues 21s. 4d., including postage.

## 'We Never Smoke During Battle'

*An Autobiographical Exercise*

BY JOHN VERNEY



THE Battle had been raging since dawn, Northland chasing Southland over the Quantocks, like the flying cloud shadows which clung to the oak scrub and modelled each subtle combe. With the smell and sound of horses close by my head, I had bivouacked the previous night in the heather, the sea-breeze off Bridgwater Bay nipping me in my blankets. Now, though dirty and sleep-eyed, I rejoiced to be riding over wild country in early morning sun and wind. There was something, perhaps, to be said for Army life after all. Even my uniform, uncomfortably new, added a pleasure by identifying me, through wearing it, with other cavalry exploits in the past. I thought of Tolstoy's description of the young Nikolai Rostoff riding into his first action. 'There was not only nothing terrible about it, but it seemed ever more and more jolly and lively.'

‘ WE NEVER SMOKE DURING BATTLE ’

It was a pleasure, too, to escape for a day from the many social and military pitfalls of the camp. The effort of pretending to be someone I was not was proving a strain. I hated the ritualistic dinners and the long hours of horseplay which, by tradition, followed them. My brother officers were squires, farmers, land agents and the like, born and bred in the country and sharing a hundred tastes and acquaintances from childhood. In after years, drawn together by the boredom and the exile of war, I came to love them. But on first acquaintance they struck me as formidably different from myself, a Londoner whose chief interests, priggish though it sounds, were modern literature and modern art. None of my brother officers had ever heard of Proust or of Picasso. Nor did this gap in their education trouble them unduly.

As a supernumerary officer with no ‘command’ of my own, I had been attached for the Battle to a Squadron Leader to be ‘shown the form.’ He was a fierce Major called Victor Bone and as I jogged along beside him, hoping that I looked more at home on a horse than I felt, he attempted some conversation.

“And what’s your line of country in civvy street?”

“Well, um, as a matter of fact I’m an assistant film director, Sir.”

“Oh. What does all that mean?”

“Well, it’s a bit difficult to explain really, Sir. I have to see that the actors are ready to go on the set when they’re wanted and that sort of thing.”

“Good God!” snorted the fierce Major.

After that we rode on in silence and for my part, so far as the Battle went, in mystified ignorance, though I tried to pick up such clues to the confused military situation as Victor Bone let fall. For military tactics, even of the simple Boer War variety used by a Yeomanry Regiment training in 1937, were as yet unintelligible to me. Two rival kingdoms, Northland and Southland, were supposed to be at war. ‘A’ Squadron, with two Troops of ‘C’ Squadron, represented the aggressor, Northland, and wore distinguishing blue bands on their caps. ‘B’ Squadron and ‘HQ’ Squadron represented Southland, with the two remaining Troops of ‘C’ Squadron attached to them in the guise of a Mountain Battery with pack-mules. We were now, it was to be assumed, picking up the threads of a Battle that had begun the week before and in which, by 0500 hours this very morning, the opposing forces had reached positions . . . there had followed a fantastically complicated string of map references.



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To digest even this initial hypothesis required, I felt, prodigious feats of memory and imagination. I glanced enviously at Victor Bone's red neck, considerably awed that above it should exist a brain capable of performing these feats. He was a soldierly-looking figure whom I rather feared and whom, because he had shown me a gruff kindness, I was prepared to idolise. It was thus a shock to discover later that he had in fact no military qualifications—unless a permanent state of inebriation at the yearly camp for the past ten years could be called a military qualification. In 'civvy street' he himself was an insurance agent with sporting tendencies and he enjoyed these battles in the spirit of a day's fox-hunting in mid-summer.

For the moment the hounds, so to speak, had lost the scent. The Squadron huddled together on horseback under cover of a wood. Tense with the excitement of the chase, Victor Bone sat erect on his horse, his heavy cavalry moustache stirred gently by the morning breeze. He sniffed the air as if to sense from it the whereabouts of the missing enemy. Then, with a few curt orders, he sent a patrol forward to reconnoitre. I wondered whether the time would ever come when I would attain to a comparable grasp of these complex matters.

The patrol assembled itself without seeming haste ; and without seeming haste trotted off ahead. Obviously we had some time to wait before fighting could recommence. I took out a packet of cigarettes and offered one to my idol.

"Have a smoke, Sir?"

His prominent, rather red-rimmed blue eyes stared at me in outraged astonishment.

"We never smoke during battle," he said angrily.

Later in the morning, the enemy or some of them having been located on the ridge of one of the Quantock hills, he gave me the chance to redeem this unfortunate lapse by sending me on a desperate mission.

"It is vital, absolutely vital," said Victor Bone, "that we should know how many of them are up there. Gallop off, young what's-your-name, and try to work your way up to them from behind. Then report back to me with the names of any officers you can identify. That will tell me all I want to know."

Horsed cavalry operations, it had been disillusioning to discover, are seldom conducted at more than a trot. The excuse for a legitimate gallop came rarely and though I was not confident of

being able to identify any of my brother officers by name, I set off light-heartedly on my mission. For a happy and breathless twenty minutes I galloped across streams, through beech woods, into and out of combes. Then tethering my horse on the edge of a coppice I crept on my stomach through the heather. I could hear the enemy just ahead of me firing blanks, presumably at the Squadron I had left. I spotted their blue-banded caps on the skyline and crawled very stealthily forward. It was a situation that I found I enjoyed and the whole episode would hardly be worth mentioning except that it made me aware, for the first time, of a latent and unsuspected Red-Indianism in myself. Strangely, the real thing when it came was not much more real than the make-believe.

Peering round a bush of golden broom I came face to face with another officer of my Regiment. He was pale and very tall and I knew his face though not his name. He was eating his sandwiches and looked rather astonished. I was unknown to him but he must have guessed that I was the enemy for he drew his revolver and snapped it at me.

"Clicketty-click, you're dead," he said.

"No, I'm not!" I shouted and dashed away, completing our resemblance to small boys playing cops and robbers.

A mounted patrol came after me and I ran down the hill as if my life depended on it. They gained on me, and too exhausted to run further I hid in a bush. The patrol captured my horse and then with drawn swords prodded the bracken all round me.

"It's too thick," I heard the N.C.O. say in the rich burred voice of the West Country. "You could hunt all day for the bastard in this stuff."

So, leading my horse away, they abandoned the search—to my relief, for I hadn't fancied being prodded.

There seemed to be no point in attempting to return on foot to Victor Bone. Even if I reached him, which was unlikely as the sounds of battle were receding, I had nothing worth while to report and it would be shaming to admit that I didn't know the name of the officer who had killed me. So I wandered around for a time in the sun on the hillside and then, bored and exhausted, sat down beside a road and waited to be caught. Soon afterwards some enemy cavalry including the patrol that had chased me came along, an umpire with them. I was restored to my horse and the umpire, pronouncing me *hors de combat*, advised me to return to Camp.

My sword and other accoutrements jingling from the saddle, I

JOHN VERNEY

rode peacefully away from the battle down a wooded grassy combe. The larks were singing, clouds and sunshine appeared in patches between the trees with glimpses of the blue Bristol Channel beyond. My first Battle had ended more happily than Nikolai Rostoff's and as I reflected on the strange new experience of the past few days, I wondered what my friends in the Film Studio where I worked would say if they could see me. For I had kept this particular activity a secret from them.

It happened that a group photograph of the officers of my Regiment in their summer camp appeared some months later in an illustrated paper. By a most unlikely chance a copy of the paper turned up in the Studio and by a still more unlikely chance my presence in the group, looking every inch an officer and a gentleman, was spotted by Butch, one of the barbers in the make-up department. As, unable to shave, I had grown a ragged beard the difference in my two selves was the more striking. For I suffered then, as I have suffered ever since, from a delicate skin and had contracted the 'barber's itch' from this same Butch's razors and brushes. The photograph provided the simple Studio staff with jests at my expense for a long time; in fact I never quite lived it down, no one laughing louder or longer than Butch himself.

One of the pleasures of middle age is to find, looking back, how many past episodes begin already to complete a pattern. Everything seems to have occurred by plan, nothing to have been wasted, and friends forgotten for twenty years re-emerge suddenly at a fitting moment. I ran into Butch the other day working in the Hairdressing Shop at Waterloo Station. He remembered I used to wear a beard, though not the reasons for my having to wear it, and he seemed offended when I declined his cordial offer to shave me. The skin trouble, an isolated occurrence in Denham in 1937, recurred, more persistently and with more dramatic consequence to my life, in Cyrenaica in 1942, leading me to a fateful meeting in Jerusalem with the skin specialist, Doctor Katzenellenbogen. And then the unknown officer whom I encountered behind the bush of golden broom . . .

I shall call him Amos. I saw him again in the ante-room, where the officers, smartly dressed in blue patrols with chain-mail on the shoulder and clinking spurs, assembled before dinner. The ante-room was a draughty marquee adjoining another draughty marquee, where we ate. You could smell the damp grass under the threadbare, alcohol-stained Persian carpet. A pressure lamp hung on

the tent post, vividly lighting up the faces and the chain-mail, but casting eerie shadows over the rest of the scene, the flapping canvas roof and walls, the dilapidated basket chairs, the old piano, the thirty officers . . . The lamp hissed and began to fade.

"Muggs! Come and fix this bloody lamp!" shouted Victor Bone who, as P.M.C., organised the comforts of the Mess. Muggs was the civilian waiter provided annually by the messing contractor, along with the carpet and the basket chairs. White-faced and undersized, he seemed to live in a permanent state of hardly-repressed insubordination, always muttering as he went about his work what I assumed to be threats. 'You wait, you bastards. When the Day comes . . .', I imagined him to be saying under his breath. My social conscience, in those days, was highly developed. It was intolerable that Muggs should be kept up serving glasses of port or beer night after night till 2 a.m. and then be expected to serve breakfast at 8 a.m. Years later I found out what it was that Muggs muttered. He was memorising the innumerable drinks to be charged to the different officers' accounts. Now he tinkered with the lamp till it burnt brightly again.

"Stop mucking about with that light and fetch me another pink gin."

Doubtless Victor Bone suffered many humiliations as an insurance agent, so that not the least of the pleasures he derived from this yearly masquerade as a cavalry officer was that, in turn, of humiliating Muggs.

"Bloody civilian," he growled as Muggs left the ante-room to fetch the pink gin.

My sympathy for Muggs was probably uncalled-for. When war was declared, Muggs voluntarily travelled all the way from Bermondsey to join the Regiment. I heard Victor Bone say, 'Good show, Muggs' when he enrolled him. Muggs became my batman. He grew quite fond of me, I think, but I always remained, with my snivelling humanitarianism, a poor sort of creature in his eyes compared to Victor Bone, whom he regarded as the embodiment of everything he himself would have wished to be.

Amos, when I entered the ante-room, was standing alone, a detached, sardonic expression on his pale face, which contrasted with the bucolic health of the others. He looked rather bald, I thought, for a Second-Lieutenant. Actually he was thirty-three, ten years older than myself. He recognised me as I walked up to him.

"Clicketty-click. You were dead but you wouldn't lie down," he said, grinning.

We chuckled over the absurd incident. Then, with becoming diffidence, we followed our seniors into the dining-tent. Dinner in camp was treated as a formal occasion, perhaps to hide from ourselves the fact that we were merely amateur soldiers. Various cups were ranged down the long tablecloth, on either side of the Regimental trophy itself, a monstrous facsimile in pure silver of a cavalry officer mounted on his charger, with every detail of saddlery and equipment accurately rendered. The effigy was quarter life-size. The Padre, Hilary, said a Latin grace. Then we took our places, the Colonel in the centre with senior officers like Victor Bone or the 'Regular' Adjutant near him, while newly joined officers such as Amos and myself huddled in outer darkness at the ends. Throughout dinner the Regimental brass band, stationed by its impresario R.S.M. Burge just outside the marquee, played 'The Overture to William Tell' and other pieces suitable to the occasion. Conversation at this stage of the evening was necessarily restrained.

Life has few excitements to offer compared with that of making a new friend. As, through dinner, Amos and I talked in subdued voices about ourselves, I could hardly believe my good fortune at having found in these unlikely surroundings a congenial spirit who shared my enthusiasm for Proust and who had not only heard of Picasso but even possessed several of his paintings. Amos was a business man who built roads successfully. He also owned a half-share in a London Art Gallery, he told me to my astonished delight. I was deeply impressed. To build roads at all seemed much. But to own half an Art Gallery as well!

'I make the tar pay for the Art,' he said, for he always refused to talk seriously about his business affairs. But Art dealing was only one of many such sidelines in Amos' life. In all the years we were friends I was never able to piece together the whole picture of his business ramifications. Nor have I been able to since. That side of him remains slightly unreal and fabulous, like a character in the Arabian Nights. Perhaps he preferred it so and I am not surprised. After the war, as one of his executors, I spent many hours attempting to make sense out of the financial muddle he left behind. Certainly the tar paid for the Art. But what precisely paid for the tar we were never able to discover. At the time I first met him, he must have been heavily in debt, although he possessed

an immensely valuable collection of modern French paintings. Unfortunately they vanished, literally in smoke, one night in February 1944.

I don't know why Amos joined the Yeomanry. He had never ridden; he disliked horses; his exceptional height made it difficult for him to master the technique of riding and although his heroic antics won the admiration of the Regiment, they must have been as painful to perform as they were grotesque to watch. Like many cynics he was perhaps a romantic at heart. Among us geese he stood out as a sort of quixotic swan. When I asked him once why he had joined he refused, apparently, to be serious.

"I love leather and brasswork. Also I want to get in on the ground floor of what may soon become an expanding racket." I think, now, both reasons were literally true.

Perhaps at this point I should say something of my own reasons for joining the Yeomanry, so far as they are discernible. How I managed to join this particular Regiment—I shall call them the Bassetshire Yeomanry—was always a slight mystery to my brother officers and remains so to me. I had no family connection with the county and the Yeomanry was a rather snobbish county institution. For an outsider to be commissioned into it was almost unheard of. Yet somehow or other I was. My brother officers, if they looked at me askance, politely concealed their misgivings.

Why I applied for a Territorial Commission at all is also a mystery. I remember that De Vigny's *Servitude et Grandeur militaires*, with its picture of the Army as an austere Ideal, made a strong appeal to me when I read it in my first year at Oxford. Like many undergraduates, I was inclined to remodel my life on whichever hero, in fact or fiction, I was studying at the moment. But surely I had grown out of that phase by twenty-three and I had no obvious leanings towards militarism; on the contrary. I soon found, as I had suspected, that the outward forms of Army life were totally uncongenial. I disliked from the start marching in step, calling people 'Sir,' and being called 'Sir,' saluting and being saluted. Nor could I reconcile my egalitarian principles with the glaringly unequal privileges and comforts enjoyed by officers. Admittedly I was often, at a later date, glad of the privileges and comforts; as of the opportunities afforded by a commission for sightseeing. But the guilt-feeling that began with my first innocent meeting with the Army in a Yeomanry camp continued throughout our long association, poisoning it, until at length I found peace, as did Amos



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too, in a unit where officers and men shared their hardships on a more nearly equal basis. To have such qualms of conscience at all was, I supposed, a fault that lay somewhere in my own personality. I envied, even admired, those officers like Victor Bone who accepted their commissions without a moment's misgiving, who indeed looked upon them as their due.

In the autumn of 1936 when I applied for my Territorial commission, the Italo-Abyssinian War was recently over, the Spanish Civil War had recently begun. Even a self-absorbed and politically half-baked young man could not fail to be aware that world catastrophe was impending. To join the Territorial Army was the easiest and most obvious course open to anyone who felt he should make some effort to avert it. But, no. That sounds altogether too patriotic. I am sure my own motives were less worthy. Obviously I might before long be called upon to soldier compulsorily. Would it not pay to make a small sacrifice, a propitiatory offering to Fate, in the meantime? As things turned out, it did pay. Like Amos, I got in on the ground floor of an expanding racket.

But wars and rumours of wars, I fancy now, cast only a faint shadow over my life then. Shadows there were, but they came rather from an inherent melancholy. Quite simply, the prospect of a fortnight's riding in camp every year had probably more to do with my joining. Introspective, shy, tormented with most of the inhibitions of that age, I was passing through a period of various self-imposed ordeals, imposed for the good of my 'soul,' and of these riding, which frightened me, was one. No ordeal could have been greater than that of appearing for the first time before my Regiment dressed up as a Second Lieutenant and painfully ignorant of every detail of the military life that lay ahead for two weeks. I knew how to stand at attention, and that was all. If I tried to turn smartly to the left or right, I tripped over my spurs. As to the latter, the Adjutant, giving me a quick critical glance before I went on parade, pointed out that I was wearing them upside down.

"We seem to be a little untidy about the neck this morning," he added facetiously. He was probably right. I was then and, alas, have always been 'a little untidy about the neck.'

But on the whole my worries, like the apparent refusal of my Sam Browne belt and riding boots to shine, were of my own imagining. A week passed, anxiously but without disaster, and I was allowed to take part in the battle I have described. Now, as dinner

and the pleasantly secluded conversation with Amos drew to an end, I awaited a further ordeal. The Senior Subaltern, a jovial ex-rugger-blue called Alan, had warned me of it on the first evening of camp and I anticipated it now with that sick pit-of-the-stomach feeling to which English schoolboys are, perhaps fortunately, accustomed from childhood. Amos, I learnt, had not been warned. I glanced down the table to the other newly-joined officer, Fergie Deakin. Dark and wiry, he was a well-known amateur rider, about half way in age between Amos and myself, who already knew most of the other officers intimately from the race-course. He was enjoying a joke with Victor Bone and was not anyway, I suspected, the type of person to be troubled by the performance that would shortly be required of him. Lucky Fergie Deakin!

The Colonel tapped the table and stood up. We all stood up. "Gentlemen, the King!"

"The King, God bless him!" we toasted.

The Regimental brass band, tipped off by Muggs when to start, played the National Anthem and thereafter, to my relief, held its peace. The conductor, according to custom, was invited into the Mess and drank a glass of wine with the Colonel without evident enthusiasm. Cigarettes were lit, the talk livened up, Amos smoked a cigar. I wondered at his calmness. The ordeal I awaited with so much misgiving was not, in itself, so very severe. Each newly-joined officer had to stand on the table and sing the tongue-twister 'She sells sea-shells on the sea-shore' through to its end, drinking a pint of beer for every mistake he made before starting through the song over again. But as with any ordeal, the degree of severity depended simply on the temperament of the victim. For myself, a self-conscious young man who loathed beer, the prospect was appalling. The intensity of the pit-of-the-stomach feeling is oddly invariable. On this trivial occasion it was not noticeably less than it had been six years previously before being flogged at school or than it was to be, six years later, before jumping out of an aeroplane at night into a country occupied by the enemy. And on that occasion too Amos appeared unmoved.

Outside the Mess the sound of a thunderstorm blowing towards us across the Quantocks from the Bristol Channel replaced the noise of the band. The tent-poles creaked, cold gusts of air swayed the lamps, rain pattered depressingly on the canvas overhead. 'Plip, plip, plippitty, plip . . .' Water, seeping through a rotten seam in the roof, beat out a little tune in a puddle behind my chair.

The dread moment approached. I noticed Victor Bone lean across to say something to the Colonel. The latter smiled and nodded.

"Mugs," Victor Bone shouted—or rather neighed, for his voice, by some distorted process of wish-fulfilment, sounded more like a horse's than a man's. "Bring twelve pints of beer."

He then made a short glib speech to the effect that tradition was the string which held together the parcel of Regimental pride and that no tradition was more hallowed than that of newly joined officers singing 'sea-shells' to prove their mettle and drinking pints of beer when they stumbled. He himself, he concluded, accepted his own traditional role, as P.M.C., of paying for the beer. The speech was greeted with hilarious applause and cries of "Good old Victor!" "Come on the new officers!"

"Your turn first."

At least I was grateful to Victor Bone for giving me the chance to get the ordeal over quickly. I clambered on to the table and stood among the Regimental silver, with what I hoped looked more like devil-may-care insouciance than sheer pink embarrassment. Then in the guttural moaning sound on one note which serves me for a singing voice, I chanted the ditty. With cowardly cunning I had memorised the words very thoroughly beforehand. Even so I sung by mistake 'the sells she shells are sea-shells I'm sure.' I drank a pint of beer, started again, sang through it this time without a slip and was allowed to sit down.

"Thank God that's over," I muttered to Amos.

"This is a menagerie," he replied quite loudly.

The applause for my effort was kindly, if half-hearted. The performance, I was sadly aware, had been dignified and dignity is a cold dull sort of virtue. Give me the man who is uninhibited enough to make an uproarious fool of himself. Fergie Deakin, who followed me on to the table, was such a man. He had a good voice and a loud one. He sang with gusto, made several probably deliberate mistakes, drank six pints of beer in as many minutes without turning a hair and sat down again amid wild cheering and laughter. I wished I was more like Fergie Deakin.

Outside the rain pattered more loudly on the marquee, the water plip-plipped more insistently in the puddle behind my chair. A clap of thunder drowned Victor Bone's voice as, the self-appointed Master of Ceremonies, he gestured to Amos to rise.

Slowly, deliberately, Amos climbed on to the table. He stood there like a blue beanstalk, puffing unconcernedly at his cigar and

reaching with his head almost to the roof. The last living member of an old English family, he called to mind some French aristocrat at bay, humouring the mob from a tumbril. But there was also a glint of menace, a cornered look in his eyes, which seemed to say 'All right, have your piece of foolery at my expense. Only, beware . . .' I saw a similar look in Amos' eyes again, once, when an excited and angry German officer prodded his stomach with a revolver.

Holding his cigar gracefully with two fingers, Amos spoke. "With your consent, Colonel, I will drink pints of champagne. Beer doesn't agree with me I'm afraid."

The laughter and the conversation round the table stopped suddenly. The Barsetshire officers waited for a cue from the Colonel whether to take this remark as a joke or as an insult. For the first time I noticed the Colonel closely. In appearance, he seemed to have stepped straight out of Gilbert and Sullivan. 'I am the very model of a modern Major-General.' A cross between that and the silent Colonel Bramble. But the red peppery face, the grey bushy hair and moustache were a mask from which two very intelligent very blue eyes twinkled with—was it great amusement or great irritation? Would he now administer some awful snub? I feared for Amos.

But the Colonel roared with laughter. "Excellent! Victor must buy Amos a bottle of bubbly!"

"Mugs, open a bottle of champagne." Victor Bone took his line, not with a very good grace, from the Colonel.

"Better make it two bottles," Amos said quietly.

"Ha! Ha!" laughed the officers. "Two bottles, very good that. Good old Amos. Poor old Victor." The bottles being opened, Amos began.

"She sells sea-shells on the sea shore," he said in a flat tired talking-voice.

"Sing! You must sing!" yelled Victor Bone and several others.

Amos paused. "I never sing." He glanced politely at the Colonel.

For the moment, as if possessed of some ancient hereditary power, nameless yet undeniable and demanding obedience, Amos had become his own Master of Ceremonies, supervising his own execution. The Colonel, I discovered when I came to know him well later, regarded this particular Regimental tradition with even less

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enthusiasm than did Amos himself. It was the sort of boorish joke which could be made amusing by a natural buffoon like Fergie, but which, with someone like Amos, fell rather flat. The Colonel was secretly delighted to watch the tables turned now on Victor Bone.

"Oh all right, Amos, do it your way," he said.



So, for what seemed to me a long ten minutes, Amos ploughed laboriously through the tongue-twister, slipping-up, drinking a pint of champagne, beginning all over again, slipping-up again, and so on. By the time he had finished he had drunk the two bottles—no mean feat—amid general laughter which was the louder for hiding general embarrassment. Swaying slightly, or did the lamps and the storm outside create that effect? the blue beanstalk descended at last to our earthier level still smoking his cigar . . . His attitude throughout had been magnificently debonair and arrogant, I thought. But if the ordeal was designed to test each new officer's potential good-fellowship, Amos had come through it the least creditably of us three. As the officers thronged back into the ante-room, leaving Muggs to prepare the dining-tent for breakfast, I found myself pressed behind Victor Bone and the Colonel.

"Good chap, Fergie," said Victor Bone.

"Yes," grunted the Colonel.

"That new fellow Amos is a bit of a shit," said Victor Bone.

"I daresay. But an amusing one, don't you think?" replied the Colonel.

I disentangled myself hastily lest I should overhear a further unflattering assessment. All the same, I wondered, how did I fit into the only two known sub-divisions of male human being in the Victor Bone universe? Certainly I did not qualify, like Fergie Deakin, as a 'good chap.' Was I therefore in Amos' category? Hardly that either. I supposed I was just dim.

Back once more in the ante-room most of the officers were determined to make a night of it. There was cause for celebration. The day's battle had been well fought and the visiting General had given the Regiment a good 'chit.' Besides, who wanted to flounder back in the dark to his tent through the mud and rain to find, most likely, when he got there that his bed was soaked? To keep the party spirit alive Alan stood on his head and in that position drank two pints of beer off the floor. To make liquid flow upwards into your stomach seemed at the time a super-human, indeed a metaphysical achievement. We removed our spurs and organised a game of rugger. "Don't spoil the carpet," protested Victor Bone, unaware of the irony in such a precaution. So the carpet was rolled up and Fergie, doubling up on the grass floor, offered himself as a football. During the ensuing *mêlée* I noticed Amos fast asleep in a basket-chair in the corner. The rain dripping through on to his face had extinguished the cigar which still stuck out of his mouth.

Drink, or perhaps relief at having put the 'sea-shells' ordeal behind me, began to melt my natural reserve. To my satisfaction I found myself accepted as part of the Regiment for the first time. Officers who before had been anonymous now acquired names, even nicknames. 'Bubs' Tregunter, 'Boy' Harland . . . The rugger gave place to a sing-song and the carpet was put back. Alan played the piano, surprisingly well. Victor Bone sang.

"I touched her on the toe and said what's that my dear—O  
It is my toe tumper, my old bandolier—O"

Successive stanzas progressed, anatomically speaking, upwards.

Inflamed by success Victor Bone followed it with other songs, each more marvellously obscene. Arm-in-arm with Bubs Tregunter and Boy Harland I joined manfully in the choruses, though, to tell the truth, my young mind was deeply shocked. For one is charmingly pure at twenty-three. Bawdiness, I reflect now, is an aphro-



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disiac which middle age more and more needs to compensate for its flagging powers. After one particularly lurid ditty, the Colonel was heard to remark "Old Victor gets nearer and nearer to the bone."

Amos, still asleep in his corner, began to snore. The wet cigar had disappeared and his mouth was wide open. The officers gathered round him. Victor Bone, to pay off his own earlier discomfort, took a glass of beer and poured it slowly into Amos' mouth with a glug-glug noise. Amos spluttered and woke up. No one could ever quite remember what happened after that. One moment Amos was staring wildly at us. The next he and Victor Bone were locked in each other's arms rolling over the grass. They crashed against the tent-pole. The pressure-lamp fell and spilled burning paraffin over a pile of Regimental Orders on a table. The pole itself caught alight. We stood round and shrieked with laughter. Amos was the first to react sensibly. He seized a siphon of soda water and played it on the tent-pole. We followed his example with other siphons. Beer-bottles were smashed and the contents hurled at the flames. Alcohol which had started the fire, extinguished it. The crisis past, we ordered drinks all round and then we plunged out of the ante-room into the deluge, to visit the Sergeants' Mess. As we left I noticed Muggs, muttering to himself, begin to clear up the debris with a bucket and a brush.

"The Sergeants' Mess is the heart of the Regiment," R.S.M. Burge was fond of saying to young officers like myself, putting them wise, in a fatherly way, to the wrinkles of Army life. He had another favourite dictum, on the care of horses. "Always see the rug is well forward. Keep your horse's heart warm and you keep all of him warm." There may have been some unconscious connection between these two maxims for certainly, by comparison with the chaos of our own, the Sergeants' Mess was always snug and tidy and well-lit. No swinging paraffin-lamps for R.S.M. Burge. One of the sergeants had rigged up electric light from a car battery. A radiogram blared in a corner and was switched off politely when we entered.

The happy relationship between officers and sergeants was an endearing, in fact an essential feature of pre-war Yeomanry camps. Many of the N.C.O.s were successful business men who looked upon this brand of soldiering as a fortnight's escape from responsibility, with free riding thrown in. Between them they could have bought up the impecunious squirearchy, from which the officers were

mainly recruited, without feeling it. R.S.M. Burge himself came from a very different social background. With the Adjutant and the Quartermaster he was the third of the triumvirate of regulars, seconded from Cavalry Regiments, who ran the Yeomanry. The son of a Northumberland miner, he had risen in the Army the hard way and the Army had left its mark. In such an environment every man grows a protective skin. The more sensitive the feelings underneath, the tougher the skin. R.S.M. Burge's skin was very tough indeed. His present job was a cushy one, the reward of a twenty-years' struggle. Lesser men might have relaxed. But Mr. Burge, as he was called, carried it through with a tireless zeal, which reached its climax at each yearly camp when he was never seen to sleep. By day ruthless military efficiency; by night, equally important to the Yeomanry 'spirit,' relentless debauchery. Much of his success lay in his sense of showmanship. A good Regiment, it cannot be denied, is a smart Regiment. To watch Mr. Burge mounting a guard, particularly when there were women in the audience, was to watch the Great Barnum reincarnated. Altogether he was an exceptional man. Given an easier start in life he would probably have become a Bishop. As it was, many of us younger officers were sure that if war came Mr. Burge, with his apparently encyclopædic knowledge of Army matters, his Napoleonic brow, his incredible vitality, would certainly rise at once in it to dizzy heights. He was always kind to me, though I was aware of falling far below his standards of what a cavalry subaltern should be, standards based on long years of experience with cavalry Regiments in India and Egypt.

Now, drinking beer with him in the Sergeants' Mess, the libidinous flow of his anecdotes as always fascinated me. They illustrated the brutalising effect of the Regular Army on what was, basically, a sensitive temperament.

"Christ, how he bled! God, how I laughed!" said Mr. Burge, describing some accident that had once happened in Quetta.

I staggered back to my tent as daylight was breaking. The storm was over and my bed, I was thankful to find, was dry. I put my hand under the pillow and pulled out the diary in which I had intended, hitherto unsuccessfully, to record my impressions of Army life. It was a new diary, all its paper still a blank. I sucked my fountain pen for a moment, pondering. Then, in the semi-darkness, I scrawled across the front page the first cryptic entry.

'My brother officers. Are they human?'

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So ended a fairly typical day with the Yeomanry in those years. If there was little in it of military solitude and grandeur, still there were moments, like riding over the Quantocks, which compensated for the tedium of the rest. And there was much, visually, that delighted me. The horse lines, the groups of marching men, the white tents diapered with mathematical regularity on the hillside, were all very beautiful if you detached them from their implications. Certainly it was all a new experience—and I was greedy for new experiences. Perhaps I shall write about it some day, I thought, as I settled down to sleep for the two hours left before breakfast.

A fortnight passes all too quickly nowadays, but to me then the three camps I attended seemed interminable bad dreams in which, as in dreams, I lived in terror of being exposed. It was always with surprise and relief that I emerged from them at the end without Victor Bone or some other officer having pointed an accusing finger, saying while the others closed in to stare, 'Who is this?' With Amos, there was someone in this strange and hostile Army world whom, in the distance, I could smile at and be understood by; there was someone I could exchange just the faintest wink with.

He was older than I so that his friends and interests, apart from the Art Gallery where I occasionally saw him, were very different from mine. Inevitably we met seldom in the next three years except at camps and other Yeomanry occasions; and not always then, for Amos unlike myself, who was too scared of the Army to disobey it, turned up only when it suited him and the Adjutant was forever writing him 'rockets.' But the war with one stroke reduced us, if not to the same age, to the same plight. Through the greater part of it we clung together, by accident as well as by design, united primarily by a common sense of humour. When, a day or two before September 3rd, 1939, I arrived desolately in Bath where I had been called-up, there was Amos grinning by the bar. I felt much happier at once.

\* \* \*

Some years after the war, invited to lunch in a famous London Club, I thought of Amos and of his debts, long since written off, as I parked my car on the open space where his gallery had once stood, in that area behind St. James's Street primarily dedicated to the display of scarlet cardinals sipping port. A few minutes later, as so often happens, I came on his name again.

‘WE NEVER SMOKE DURING BATTLE’

“Are you *sure* Brigadier Bone is expecting you?” asked the plum-coloured janitor, quizzing my battered hat, my stained overcoat, my bulging portfolio. And I noted that whereas he led other guests unquestioningly into some inner smoking-room or library, myself he held, pending further investigations, in the limbo of the hall.

So, to pass the time, I glanced at the list of fallen members on the Club war memorial. I was startled to see Amos’ distinguished name among them.

‘Killed in Italy 1943?’ was printed beside it.

The uncertainty of his exact fate, which has caused me personally so much anxiety and trouble, would have amused him who loved to weave mysteries. I had forgotten he used to belong to this Club. Then, among many other memories, I recalled an occasion during the Battle of Alamein when he and I, smoking furiously, had sat under the lee of Victor Bone’s tank, discussing the seeming uncertainty of our prolonged existence on this planet. Amos had pulled a letter from his pocket and shown it to me. The letter, highly acrimonious, was from the Secretary of his Club threatening to suspend his membership unless he paid a debt of £350. Glee-fully Amos had torn the letter up.

“The one good thing about all this,” he had said, waving at the smoke and hubbub around us, “is that none of my creditors—or my wife’s creditors either for that matter—can reach me here!”

Perhaps he is still saying it.

## Unfolded Tents

### Lady Ellenborough Comes Home

BY LESLEY BLANCH

*The Honourable Jane Digby, daughter of Admiral Digby, and granddaughter of the first Earl of Leicester of Holkham, the great landowner better known as Coke of Norfolk, was born in 1807. As a raging beauty of seventeen she was married off to Lord Ellenborough, a widower many years her senior. Her liaison with Prince Felix Schwarzenburg occasioned a spectacular divorce : after some highly-coloured years in Paris, where her name was linked with that of Balzac, Bernadotte, and others, she settled in Munich, where she captivated that emotional monarch, Ludwig I. Her marriage to the Bavarian Baron Carl Venningen ended in a runaway dash with a Greek, Count Spyridon Theotoky ; after their marriage she settled in Athens, and appeared to have settled down, as her distressed English relatives hoped. But it was not to be—not yet : not until, at last, she found herself living among the Bedouin, where, as the wife of the Sheik Medjuel el Mezrab, she found the love of her life, the life of love she had sought, so ardently and so long.*

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SHE was an Amazon. Life was spent riding at breakneck speed towards the wilder shores of love. For her, each new affair was an encampment set up along the way ; sometimes a palace, sometimes a tent, but always the supreme refuge. She was not a nymphomaniac, however, for at each camp she seems to have believed the journey over. As it happened, it took her thirty-five years to reach her true destination, a fact she sometimes deplored as much as her detractors. After each heartbreak there was a new dash, a new hope, and then, a new camp pitched hastily along the way. Too hastily, perhaps. But then, as some Mediterranean philosopher has said, life is three-quarters love, and Jane Digby loved life. Her error was probably that she believed she could force the hand of destiny, could find her fate by looking for it. So, in retrospect, we see this Amazonian creature galloping breathlessly from camp to camp, ever onwards towards a goal she had to reach, but which she could not reach alone.

The love-story, so multi-heroed, which is the life-story of Jane Digby El Mezrab, begins in Norfolk and ends in Damascus. Athens was a half-way house ; the watershed of romantic living standing between West and East. At forty-five, she found herself as Countess Theotoky, the centre of the tiny capital's social life.

Athens had an oriental passion for scandal. It ran through the salons and cafés as through a bazaar. It was in keeping with the city's many other oriental traits. If it was not, truly, the East, neither was it the West—but a wild scene, part Turk, part Slav, part Levantine. There were the seething Turkish bazaars, the cafés where the population spent most of the long hot nights smoking their narghilyés and drinking innumerable cups of coffee. The ill-lit, noisome streets were crowded with exotic costumes from the various islands and provinces. There were wafts of incense from the dark ikon-studded churches where the chanting of the monks mingled with the piercing sweet mournful songs the peasants sang. Along the waterfront the sailors lolled by their gaudily painted boats, dozed, drank *raki* and gambled. In the centre of the town where the Bavarian architects had spasmodically re-created a few Philhellenic façades, Greek society lived as much *à l'Européenne* as their surroundings permitted.

Athens was a come-by-chance capital, having been chosen for archæological rather than political or economic reasons. The young King Otho had selected the site, probably in deference to the classical interests of his father. Before he had been installed as monarch, Athens had been a fishing village, scarcely remembering the legends of its glorious past. The new capital would have been better placed strategically at the Isthmus of Corinth. But health and commerce had to take second place ; so the village mushroomed up, overnight, into an agglomeration of booths and palaces. In 1852 it was said to have 20,000 inhabitants, but only 2,000 houses. A great number of the population lived and slept in the streets. Ministries and tribunals were situated oddly, over shops, or behind noisy *gargottes*, and high government officials were lodged in inns. There were few diversions : Karaguez, the puppet whose lewd antics are known all over the Levant ; gossip, which always attained the malevolent stature of scandal, and cards—cards morning, noon, and night. When Edmond About, the French writer, asked the Countess Theotoky if she were interested in cards, she replied, "We are in Greece—don't ask me to speak ill of its religion."

Still, the tiny capital was the world, the flesh and the devil to



the Balkans. Rich Moldavian nobles travelled great distances to spend their patrimony there in riotous living. All around were the wild hills and mountains. It was described as being Arcadia, infested by brigands. But Athenian society did not venture far afield, unless joining a religious pilgrimage to some inaccessible rockbound monastery. Few people paid any attention to 'The Ruins,' as they were called. Archæology, though favoured by a few cultivated foreigners, left the modern Greeks comparatively unmoved.

Of all the many races who crowded into the little city it was the Pallikares who were the most striking. They were a legendary lot, mercenaries—and cut-throats, some people said—from the Albanian mountains. They had fought magnificently in the War of Independence, and it was to keep them amiably disposed that King Otho nominated their chief, the General Xristodolous Hadji-Petros, as his new aide-de-camp in succession to Count Theotoky.

When the Albanian General swooped down on Athens from his mountain lair, he was soon the most talked of person at Court. He was much fêted by the women, for he was a handsome and romantic figure. And since he was the chief of the Pallikares, the King found it expedient to appoint him Governor of the province of Lamia, too. He must have been a splendid man, towering over the tallest, ferocious looking, and as handsome and seductive at sixty as many men half his age. He ruled in as princely a fashion, as he dressed. He wore Albanian costume, all crimson and gold embroideries, and he bristled with pistols and yataghans, which he did not hesitate to use. His horses were trapped out in gold and silver. His men swaggered about, wildly moustachioed, and reeking of garlic. They wore great shaggy cloaks, and looked like bears, some said. Like wasps said others, remarking their incredibly small waists, induced or maintained, surprisingly, by the habit of tight lacing. Edmond About calls them the wasps of Aristophanes. This ruthless and theatrical band put the Athenian ladies in a flutter. The Queen was said to have had a particularly tender regard for their Chief, Hadji-Petros.

But it was the old, old story. In a short while Jane had fallen in love again, tempestuously, sincerely. No matter that he was over sixty, a widower with children somewhere in the background. He was a Pallikare, a man from the mountains who breathed fire and adventure, and who stood for all the wildness which Jane had always craved. They lived together in the mountains, galloping

over the savage wastes by day, sleeping in camp, surrounded by the brigands, at night. She lived among them, sharing their reckless adventures and hardships. It must not be forgotten that Jane was by upbringing athletic. She was proud of being able to shoot a pheasant from her saddle at full gallop. Now, at last, her vagrant cravings were satisfied. The cushioned comforts of her former life seemed stifling. She decided to divorce Theotoky and marry Hadji-Petros. This prospect appeared both romantic and practical to her lover, who was penniless and eyed her fortune longingly. Not that it was such a large one and, not that he did not love her passionately, and had fallen a willing victim to such charms, especially as he was in his late sixties, when to carry off such a prize was especially flattering. But the Queen was not to be trifled with. She had been jealous of Jane before. First on account of her husband ; then, she had resented Jane's popularity with the people, who called her their Queen of Love and Beauty, and hailed her rapturously as she rode through the streets. And now, the seductive Hadji-Petros was snatched from under her nose.

When Jane began negotiations for her divorce and remarriage the Queen struck. Hadji-Petros was relieved of his command of the Pallikares as well as the Governorship. The lovers returned to Athens in disgrace. Alas ! the brigand proved to be a sycophant. He wrote to the Queen, pleading for reinstatement. ' If I am this woman's lover it is not for love's sake, but purely for self-interest. She is wealthy, I am poor . . . I have a position to maintain children to educate.' But the Queen did not relent. She retaliated by publicising the letter. Even then, Jane remained infatuated . . . more perhaps with the brigand than the man and with what he represented in terms of adventure and escape. It was escape, too, from middle-aged inactivity, the settled pattern which was her anathema, and which she tolerated no more at forty-six, in Athens, than at twenty-seven, in Munich. It was not so much that she wished to remain young—who does not ? But rather that she did not age, inwardly or outwardly. Along with the freshness of her beauty ' the morning hue,' she retained the irresponsible optimism and greediness of youth.

She set about building a magnificent mansion, something to dazzle all Athens, which was to be the fortress of their love. If the world wanted none of them, the world would be well lost. For the present, however, they lived rather shabbily at the wrong end of the town. Very few people called. Still, if it lacked style it

was not humdrum. Jane now preferred the garlic-eating tchibouk-smoking Pallikares to all the scented, internationalised Phanariotes and courtiers. Flinging herself as wholeheartedly as ever into her latest entanglement, she saw herself the ever-loving wife of Hadji-Petros, a second mother to his children and the inspiration of his men. She was ready to submerge her personality and acquire the submission required of Pallikare women. She would live sequestered, prostrated before her lord and master . . . It was a lovely pipe dream, engendered by the wreathing smoke of the tchibouks, perhaps, as the Pallikares sat belching genially round the camp-fires they insisted on lighting in her newly planned garden.

It was at this time, in 1852, that Edmond About first met her. He found her a fascinating study, the outstanding personality of Athens, and still a great beauty, looking nowhere near her true age. He rhapsodised over her perfect figure, her aristocratic hands and feet, her chestnut-golden hair, her large deep blue eyes. 'As to her teeth, she belongs to that section of the *élite anglaise* who have pearls in their mouths, beside which other women's teeth look like piano keys.' He went on to say her skin had the milky whiteness, the transparent clarity so essentially English. She coloured, he said, at the slightest emotion; '. . . her passions,' he said, warming to his theme, 'could be seen agitating in their imprisonment.' She made a profound impression on the inquisitive Frenchman who was as awed by her reputation as her beauty.

Yet not all her beauty, not her, by now, considerable experience could save Jane from another disaster. A less romantic or childish woman might have been warned of Hadji-Petros' true nature by the manner in which he had tried to reinstate himself in the Queen's favour. But Jane was always the giver, emotionally as well as materially. She continued to love Hadji-Petros, sharing out her fortune between the absent, forgotten Spyridon (who seems to have applied for some Consulate post, and to have been delighted to continue in the state of pensioned-off husband) and the brigand lover, who was as impecunious as picturesque and quite unable to contribute to a *ménage* which ran on Jane's extravagant plans. Financial questions never bothered her greatly, and she was fortunate in that so much of her life was spent in times and countries where her English income, set at around £3,000 per annum, represented great wealth. Besides, there were sometimes *gages d'amour*, too, splendid jewels—her emeralds were famous; and no doubt there was always credit, the comfortable habit of the age.

The brigand idyll drifted on, domestically enough, until Jane discovered Hadji-Petros was in reality more enamoured of her maid Eugénie. It was a severe disillusion, a blow to both her heart and her pride. Eugénie had been her discreet and faithful companion for many years, and through so many, many adventures. She is an enigmatic figure. It is not known when, precisely, she entered Jane's employ, nor from where she came. Probably she was French; perhaps she had begun her years of service during the Schwarzenburg liaison in Paris. We imagine her, rather bilious-looking, dark-browed and taciturn; a Frenchwoman from some remote province; from Auvergne, perhaps; her brilliant, small, black eyes ever watchful, alert for the least rumpling of a collar. A faint down emphasising her thin, unsmiling lips, her face softening rarely, but her whole life's force of loyalty and devotion centred round Madame; round Madame's comfort—Madame's toilettes, Madame's position in *le beau monde*. Defending Madame from all comers, and occasionally defending Madame from herself.

Yet as it was Eugénie who told her mistress of the General's conduct, I cannot help feeling that, for once, she acted less in the interests of her mistress (if the story was true, which is not proven) than in a desperate bid for self-preservation. Jane must have been an exigent mistress, and the numbers of moves, sudden flights, new homes and countries must have been tiring for Eugénie. No doubt she saw it all in terms of her work. Packing; unpacking; finding soap or curling tongs in outlandish places; walking Jane's adored dogs; making-do in temporary quarters, making all those foreigners understand. . . . And now, the Pallikares! What self-respecting lady's maid could have faced with composure the prospect of life in a brigand's lair? No doubt she acted for their good. The good of herself and her mistress, that is, in making the disclosure she reckoned she would bring an end to the affair. Poor Eugénie! how could she foresee it would have the effect of launching Jane into yet another precipitous flight, this time to undreamed-of deprivations, to scenes wilder and stranger than any Pallikare encampment, and finally, the arms of an Arab sheik?

Jane was both loving and forgiving. She had ignored Hadji-Petros' manner of explaining away their liaison to the Queen. She knew he enjoyed her money—that was nothing—but to enjoy her maid, too, that was insupportable. He had humiliated her in public; now he humiliated her in private. It was the end. She told Eugénie to pack. Overnight she decided to break camp once

more. Without disclosing her plans to anyone, least of all to her lover, she left Athens with the subdued but still devoted Eugénie. They sailed for Syria, where she had for some time past thought of going to buy an Arab horse worthy of her Pallikare. And so the black Bedouin tents came into view, at last.

Arrived in Syria, Jane planned to visit Baalbeck, Jerusalem and Palmyra. She would track down Zenobia's legendary kingdom. Perhaps she was fired by *Eothen*. She must have read Kinglake's accounts of his travels in the Near East, for she was always an energetic reader, keeping abreast of new literature by means of large packets of books sent regularly from London and Paris.

She had become a deeply cultivated woman. The manner of her living had not affected the quality of her thinking. She was musical ; she painted, and her sculpture was said to be remarkable ; she followed the intellectual developments in Europe closely, and she spoke and read eight languages : later, she was to add Arabic to the list.

She may have felt that only archæology remained, and no doubt Eugénie fostered this attitude which promised a more reposeful way of life for both of them. But it was not to be. Less than a month after she left Athens she was involved with an Arab of surpassing attractions. Not much is known about Sâlih. He was young, handsome, lusty, and as conscious of her charms as she was of his. There is no suggestion that he was the sort of opportunist dragoman who could be hired out by any lonely lady. He appears to have been a splendid creature, very possessive, who swept her off her feet and into the black Bedouin tents of his encampment out in the desert. Jane was enraptured. The Pallikares paled. When Sâlih's tribe entertained her with the traditional and picturesque Arab hospitality, she was lost. . . . All at once she discovered the living East, and it went to her head. No use for Eugénie to purse her lips, waiting with the heavy luggage at the inn. Her mistress was away savouring the desert life along the Jordan, discovering its climate, at once langorous and fierce, primitive and subtle. Another *coup de foudre* ! This time her love for the Arab people and their ways was to last for the rest of her life. Once again she had found the perfect love ; she would be united for ever, suspended in Time in a state of perpetual bliss. They would marry ! His people should be her people, his ways her ways. . . . Suddenly it was imperative to proceed with the divorce from Theotoky, which

up to now had hung fire. The building of Hadji-Petros' love-nest must be stopped. Sâlih was all. By which it will be seen that Jane's heart had remained as young as her person. For so experienced a woman, she was really astonishingly naïve.

But before returning to Athens to obtain her liberty, she decided to visit Palmyra. Archæology elbowed even emotion aside. Sâlih was piqued. He had not reckoned on an inanimate rival. Besides, he could not accompany her. Probably there was some question of inter-tribal warfare. The desert Arabs were in a permanent state of battle, plundering and skirmishing. Safe-conducts, an ironic term, were often given to travellers, but were for the most part not worth the paper they were written on. Even if it was convened that the tribes of the Shammar, the Fedâan, Gomassa or any other, should respect the traveller, once out of their zone, the trail would lead to fresh dangers from another tribe or nomad band, all of whom had their system for raids, and apparent rescues (with a division of the reward) worked out among themselves. One band of brigands would swoop on the caravan of unsuspecting travellers, with a terrifying display of horsemanship with much firing of flintlocks and brandishing of spears. They would take all they could lay hands on, and at a given moment, there would always be a dramatic swoop by yet another band of horsemen who would drive off the first, appear to vanquish them, and return to claim the award for saving the lives of the travellers. This way, double profits could be made to the benefits of all concerned—all the Arabs, that is. It was in fact a racket.

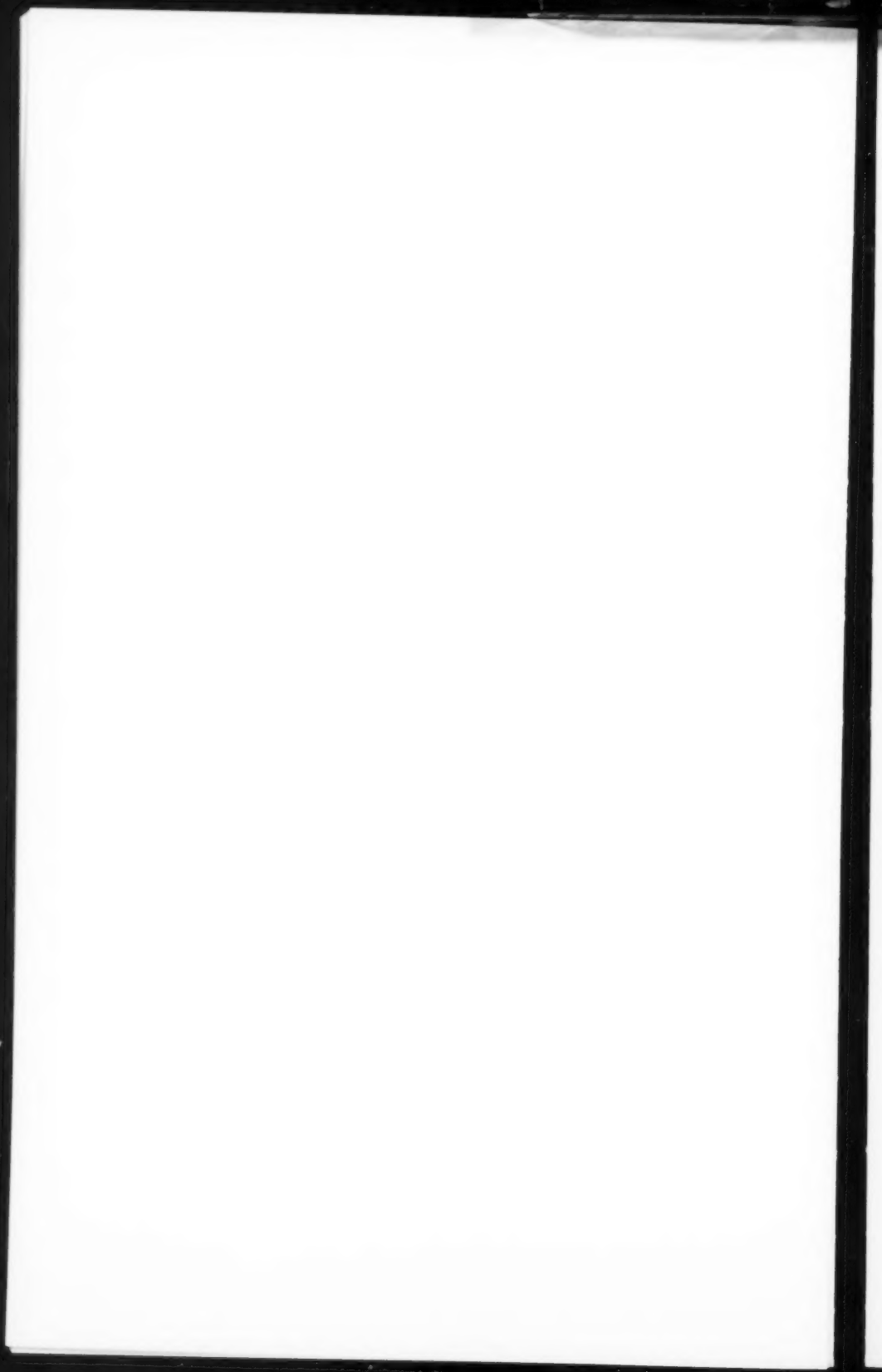
No one was safe, and although this particularly transparent technique was not practised between the Arabs themselves, still it was often a matter of life and death for one tribe to venture across alien territory. The two great rival factions were the Shammar and the Anazeh. The Euphrates lay between them, and centuries of blood feud too. Such an atmosphere of drama was, as always, the breath of life to Jane. Nothing Sâlih could say dissuaded her. She would go alone. She set about negotiations for the journey. Damascus had all the provincial town's curiosity; added to which there were the bazaars, where rumour began, but never ended. Jane was a conspicuous figure, and getting herself talked about, as always. Her fatal mixture of beauty, careless wealth and complete disregard for the conventions interested both the Arab and the European population. Directly her project was known there were half a dozen rival bands planning their raid and rescue





*Painted by Steele*

JANE DIGBY, AT THE TIME OF HER SECOND MARRIAGE,  
TO BARON VENNIGEN



manœuvres. Arabs are, by nature, a predatory people. Jane was fair game. Whispers of her adventure with Sâlih had reached the European Colony, too, who were scandalised but perhaps not surprised. The British Consul deplored her arrival in Damascus. Perhaps he was thinking of the many inconveniences suffered by a former Consul, on behalf of another eccentric English noblewoman, Lady Hester Stanhope. The Countess Theotoky was so very beautiful too ; it might lead to all sorts of unpleasantness ; from the official, Foreign Office, viewpoint affairs with Arabs came under that heading.

It was while negotiating for a small caravan to take her across the desert, a nine-day's march at that time, that she encountered the Arab who was to become her fourth and last husband, her great love, the Sheik Abdul Medjuel El Mezrab. His tribe were a branch of the Anazeh. They controlled the desert round Palmyra and were, for the tribal habits of their day, a particularly honourable and cultivated lot. They were neither rich nor numerous, but their blood was blue. The Sheik Medjuel was the second of nine sons. His father, the ruler of the tribe, had been a remarkable man, who had insisted that all his children obtain a wide education. Medjuel could read and write, which was a distinction among the Bedouin. He spoke several languages, and was well-read ; he had studied the histories of ancient Syria, and knew the desert and its legends as few others. Sometimes he acted as escort to distinguished travellers. It augmented the tribe's finances, and brought him interesting contacts with the outside world. It was suggested that he should act as Jane's guide. And so they met.

Medjuel El Mezreb was only a few years younger than Jane. He was not at all the novelette version of the blazing-eyed desert Adonis, though it must be remarked that nearly all Arab men possess those glittering and impenetrable black eyes so irresistible to European women. He followed the pastoral and nomadic tradition of his people. (It was only after fifteen years of marriage that Jane persuaded him to a knife and fork.) He was both scholarly and virile, with character and humour. He was of the desert. He had none of what Doughty calls 'the glozing politic speech of the town Arab.' He impressed all the distinguished travellers who were later to visit him when he and Jane were man and wife. Byron's granddaughter, Lady Anne Blunt, and her husband the poet Wilfred Scawen Blunt, encountered him during their wanderings in Syria, where they were buying the Arab horses

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they afterwards introduced into England. They did not see him as *le mari de Madame*, but a personality in his own right.

But at the moment of their first meeting, Jane was still under Sâlih's spell. Medjuel was merely a courteous Arab with whom she was negotiating terms. Medjuel, however, was at once intrigued by his odd and beautiful client. '*Engleysi*' . . . a man-woman, shrugged the Arabs, lounging in doorways, eyeing the heavy baggage being loaded. Eugénie, so efficient, so long-suffering, always had to unpack silver, damask and fine bed-linen for every wayside halt. She had done it right across Europe, from Paris to Greece and all over the Balkans; now it was the desert. If up to the present Jane had not travelled with an excessive attention to luxury, neither had she yet learned to live *à la* Bedouin. That was to come. Only a very rich maniac could travel about like that, the Arabs decided, and among themselves they discussed plans for raiding her caravan.

The expedition started out in style. Medjuel had brought a larger retinue. There were outriders, baggage camels, horses, and of course the foster-camels which were used as travelling dairies, or mobile milk supplies for the highly-bred Arab horses who could obtain no pasturage in the arid desert wastes. The slow plodding sway of the camel train was a base from which Jane and the by now enslaved Medjuel galloped off into tawny distance to visit the ruins, lonely encampments or oases that lay off their route. Jane was as tireless a horsewoman in her forties as in her twenties, when she had astonished Balzac. Perhaps she began to realise that, for women, travel, in the real sense, only begins where love leaves off—you cannot serve two masters. Most women find their views of countries have been filtered through the personality of their companion. An emotional life presupposes a concentration of time and energy lavished on one person; there is little left over for places. Medjuel hunted antelope and wolves, and shot partridges, and Jane did a little sketching, in the true Victorian tourist's manner. Romantic ruins, and 'those poor dear camels,' as she often called them. She was still doing the sights, as an outsider, in polite perspectives, reminiscent of the drawing-room albums then in vogue. For Medjuel, it was probably love at first sight. Love tinged with bewilderment and a sense of daring. It was unheard of that he, a Moslem, a Sheik, should consider marrying a Christian. Yet very early he sensed that if he wished to have her for himself he must take such a drastic step. By now he had heard of Sâlih.

There would be others. He did not want to be one of a string of experimental Arab amours. She was, he knew, a great lady, but he had no feeling of aspiring to her hand. He was an Arab noble—his blood quite as blue as hers. If anything, he considered whether he himself was not risking too great a *mésalliance*. But he said nothing for the moment, and the expedition went on its way. At night they all sat round the camp-fire, and flames lit up the swarthy faces as they laughed and talked among themselves, in the guttural Arabic Jane could not yet follow. (She and Medjuel spoke a mixture of the French and Turkish he knew passably well.) It was a series of exotic picnics, to Jane, as she sat among the Bedouin eating roasted lamb basted with sheeps' youghourt and wild honey. Outside, the circle of camels groaned and barked in their melancholy fashion and the horses whinnied in the darkness; far away a jackal howled. Jane, sleeping unmolested in her black Bedouin tent, still dreamed of Sâlih, but Medjuel dreamed of Jane.

Once again, as in the duel between Venningen and Theotoky, there was a dramatic episode verging on farce. This time the duel was a tribal rather than a personal matter, but it was still fought over Jane. The caravan was on its way, about six days out from Damascus, when they were suddenly surrounded by a ferocious-looking band of horsemen, brandishing spears and demanding their money or their lives. Damascus had rung with ghastly stories of the fate met by desert travellers. Some never returned; there was talk of whitened bones, carrion crows, ransoms, tortured hostages, death by thirst . . . two Englishmen had lately crawled back stripped of all but a copy of *The Times*. Jane turned trustfully to Medjuel.

Now it is possible that since this was one of the customary pre-arranged hold-ups, and was in fact conducted by some of Medjuel's own tribe, he was aware of the plan and allowed it to proceed in order to appear to be Jane's defender, a chivalresque figure, *sans peur et sans reproche*. It is equally possible he knew nothing of it, was taken by surprise, but being by now emotionally involved, decided to defend the object of his love. At any rate he behaved with what the tribesmen found a bewildering loyalty to his client, rather than themselves. He rushed into battle, rallied his own men round him, and at the point of his lance routed the marauders. The whole thing had taken place in a few moments of violent action and counter-action. Jane, who always thrived on drama, found the incident most stimulating. Medjuel was brave as a lion,

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a hero, her saviour. There were some tender passages that led Medjuel to hope : the more so, since it was common bazaar talk that Sâlih had already found other, younger charmers as irresistible.

Indeed when Jane returned from Athens, where she had gone to wind up her affairs, in 1853, she found a rival installed ; a Bedouin girl called Sabla ; very young, and very impudent. Jane retreated, beaten at the start by Sabla's invincible youth. Once more there were tears and regrets, and wild longings for the past and her golden hey-day. Evidently, only travel and archæology remained. She saw before her the awful abyss of remorse and a solitary old age. Still, there could be no turning back. England was closed to her ; so was Bavaria. Paris——? No ; she had done with big cities. To return to Greece would have been unthinkable. She had burned her boats. The East, which had lured her and punished her, could still comfort her. She loved the land and the life. She set about learning Arabic, and decided that she would retire to a little house hidden away in the Arab quarter of Damascus. Eugénie was still to be counted on. They would grow old together, surrounded by the cats and dogs she loved. Now there would be more time for them. There are natures which need love, a lover's presence, to enjoy a landscape, a symphony, or even their food. Love seems to be a part of their basic metabolism ; age does not change such natures ; their craving only perishes with life itself. Jane was such a one. Therefore, it was in a mood of black depression she set about making the best of the dust and ashes that remained to her.

She began to explore the country. Edward Lear, returning from Petra on one of his sketching tours which produced the meticulous and lovely water colours so long neglected beside his Nonsense Rhymes, mentions meeting her about this time. 'Lady Ellenborough in a crimson velvet pelisse and green satin riding habit, going up to complicate the absurdities of Jerusalem,' he writes, tantalisingly. We long to know more. Did they meet at some verminous wayside inn ? Did they exchange travellers' platitudes, insecticides, and sketching notes ? It is unlikely they were very much together—they could have had little in common, this painfully shy, neurotic, 'pixilated' man, always building barriers of illness, nonsense and inhibitions between himself and reality, and Lady Ellenborough, entirely uninhibited, very healthy, living life to the full, all barriers down.

At this time Syria appeared to most Europeans as far more remote



and ill-regulated than India. For centuries it had been under Turkish rule. The Porte appointed local Sheiks to administer the different provinces, but often with the intent to set them at each other's throat. Once a year the great religious pilgrimages to Meccah roused the country to a ferment. There were various routes, according to the place of departure ; from North Africa ; from Arabia ; from Cairo. The Western Hadj or caravan of pilgrims used to leave Damascus, where it was swelled by more pilgrims from Constantinople. Side by side with this immemorial scene, there were now prospectors, working on the proposed Euphrates Valley Railway which was to be a short cut to India, but which was finally abandoned in 1872. Greek boats called at the ports bringing mail about twice a month. For trans-desert communication there were dromedary couriers ; the Damascus-Hit route was known as the Road of Death, for it was infested by bandits, and the wells were 250 miles apart. As early as 1160 the Fatimid Caliphs of Cairo had established a special courier pigeon service which had been in use for generations. The birds flew in relays : Cairo, Basra, Beyrout, Constantinople : on the Little Desert route they winged from Damascus to Palmyra and Meshed Rahba. There were bird towers every fifty miles.

Out of these savage wastes, rockbound and arid, rose the ruins of Zenobia's empire, and the veined pink cliff-face of Petra, ' the rose-red city half as old as time.' To the west, Damascus bloomed among its gardens. Damascus, ' Shaum Sheref,' the Holy or Blessed, it was called. Mohammed is said to have gazed on it and called it Paradise. He declined to dally, however, holding there must be only one Paradise—Allah's own. ' Minarets peered out from the midst of shade, into the glowing sky and, kindling, touched the sun,' says Kinglake. It was a landscape of milk and honey. But it was not insipid. In the winter the snows came down, wolves howled in the foothills, and the tribes moved south on their annual migratory trek, always searching pasturage for their sheep and camels. These tribes were accounted by their number of flocks, or in the case of warrior tribes, by the spears they mustered.

Syria was as violently picturesque as its history, which still echoed with the name of Rustem and his elephants, and great Tamburlaine. Within living memory Mahommed Ali, who butchered the Mamelukes, had coveted Syria for himself but his sieges and schemes came to nothing, and he had been seen languishing in a Neapolitan hotel, playing whist with a young American

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tourist, said those who returned to Damascus to tell of the old tyrant. His son, Ibrahim Pasha of Acre, too, had come to nothing, and was last heard of in London at the Reform Club . . . Syria settled back again with relief. Not that anyone could call it a really peaceful place, or one recommended to tourists. Very few travellers passed through, in the forties and fifties. After Lady Hester Stanhope, Jane Digby was one of the first European women to venture there alone.

When, in the early Spring of 1854 she set out for Baghdad, she was still brooding over Sâlih, still recoiling from the spectre of old age. But presently there was a revivifying interlude with another Arab, the Sheik el Barrak, who found her as seductive, in her grief, and late forties, as other, earlier lovers had done in her hey-day. Perhaps the crimson velvet pelisse had something to do with it. To the Arab eye it must have seemed a queenly outfit for the rocky ravines. The Sheik was insistent, the lady was lonely. We have no record of what Eugénie thought about it all, huddled up beside the campfire, regretting, no doubt, the comparative civilisation and restraint of the Pallikares.

There were a few voluptuous days and nights together in the desert, most agreeably distracting to one in Jane's melancholy mood. But the affair proved as worthless as the man. They quarrelled : first over his unkindness to ' those poor dear camels,' and later his unsympathetic attitude towards her sketching.

When they reached Aleppo they were on very bad terms, but they continued their journey together. It is not easy to shed a caravan en route. There were no regrets on Jane's side, for there was no love, or disillusion, here. It had all been a great mistake, and it was far, far better to live without love, in solitude and dignity. But her mind still harked back, painfully, to Sâlih, and sometimes she thought affectionately of Medjuel, who had been such a different type from El Barrak ; so *simpatico*, such a *gentleman* . . .

Jane was now well known by repute to most of the Syrian Arabs, and her latest adventure had been discussed throughout the camps and bazaars ; news of her return from Baghdad soon reached Medjuel in the desert. When he heard she was riding to Damascus in company with Sheik El Barrak, he acted quickly. Suddenly, he rode up out of the horizon to meet her, bringing a beautiful Arab mare as a present ; their meeting was decisive. The Sheik El Barrak disappeared, with tact, or prudence, perhaps ; together Jane and Medjuel returned to the city. During the next few days,

Jane discovered in Medjuel all the qualities and attractions she had so often imagined were centred in other men. This time she was not deceived. Medjuel had character, brains, and breeding ; and he loved her for herself. (This was to be proved, over and over again. During the thirty years of their life together, he was always profoundly disinterested in her fortune.) Medjuel was a man of honour and kindness ; a man of romantic passion, too, she discovered. And a man of purpose. During her absence he had set about divorcing his wife, who had borne him sons and was, by Arab standards, an old woman. No one seems to have found it cruel that she was sent back to her people. She was given the dowry she had originally brought, and was in fact honourably pensioned off.

Now Medjuel was free to marry Jane on her own European terms. He proposed to her, as they drove towards Palmyra once more ; and Jane, still as full of girlish excitement and rapture as ever, recorded in her journal their first kiss. He was accepted unreservedly. Suddenly there was no more loneliness and disillusion. She had found the perfect man and the perfect life. She was reborn. '*Si je n'avais ni miroir, ni mémoire, je me croirais quinze ans,*' she wrote in her journal. Mirror or no, all contemporary accounts agree that she did not look anywhere near her age. Even when sixty-eight, she was thought to be forty. 'Those English-women have the devil's own trick for keeping young,' said one French traveller, rather grudgingly.

There was a stormy interview with the English Consul, who questioned her sanity, was outraged at the idea of the marriage, and tried to prevent it, or at any rate delay matters until he had consulted the authorities in England. But Jane was adamant. Official barriers were swept aside, and the marriage took place at Homs. Jane was at once loved and accepted by the Mezrab tribe. She was known as Jane Digby El Mezrab. The Arabs called her the Sitt, or Lady ; more picturesquely, Umn-el-Laban, Mother of Milk, in reference to her fair skin. Dressed in the traditional blue Bedouin robes, she was supremely happy among them. She felt she had come home, as indeed, she had.

And so it was to continue for all the thirty years that remained ; a blaze of noon, in which the last miasmatic phantoms of her Western self evaporated. All the glowing colour and adventure of life was centred round Medjuel, 'the dear, the adored one.' She died in his arms, one stifling August day in 1881. True to the East, there was no twilight.

## The Voyage of the 'Guardian'

BY LUDOVIC KENNEDY

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IN 1788 the first British settlement in New South Wales was established at Port Jackson, now Sydney. In order to keep the settlement supplied with stores and provisions, various men-of-war were from time to time seconded for that purpose. Among these was the *Guardian* frigate, which in the early months of 1789 was building at Woolwich. She was pierced for forty-four guns, but in view of the manner in which she was to be employed, armed *en flûte*.

The name of the captain appointed to her was Lieutenant Edward Riou ; and since the extraordinary events which befell the *Guardian* were as much his story as that of the ship, it would be as well to give some description of him.

Of his early life and career very little is known. Even the date of his birth is uncertain, though it is believed to be 1758—the same year as Nelson's. Nor are there many references to him by contemporaries, although the few that there are all testify to his uncommon character and abilities. The fullest account of him is that given by Admiral Byam Martin who knew him when he was second lieutenant of the *Salisbury* on the Newfoundland station in 1786 :

'Riou was on terms of great intimacy with my family, and his interesting and delightful character has left a deep impression on my mind. A pleasing gloom hung over his manly countenance, unlike anything I ever witnessed in any other person. His eye was peculiarly striking, beaming with intelligence. . . . His conduct in every situation private and public afforded a beautiful illustration of all the greatness and goodness his countenance so faithfully portrayed. There was a pensiveness of look and a reserve in his manner which sometimes made strangers regard him as cold and repulsive, but this first impression was soon removed, and all who knew him loved him.'

After mentioning Riou's deep religious beliefs which, Byam Martin says, were his sheet-anchor and gave him 'a serenity of mind which no peril, however sudden and appalling, could dis-

turb,' he goes on : ' Yet with all this there was an innate modesty in the man which made him utterly unconscious of the admiration with which he was regarded by all classes, and most of all by those who had the happiness to serve under his command and to profit by his example.'

There are several portraits of Riou, of which the best is the miniature by Shelley now in the possession of Major George Benson, a descendant of Riou's sister. This bears out Byam Martin's description very faithfully. There is the striking eye, the pleasing gloom, the innate modesty, and, above all, the 'greatness and goodness.' It is, which Byam Martin does not mention, a very handsome face. The coldness is there, but it is the coldness of well-tempered steel. The set features and the firm chin suggest inflexible determination and courage ; but the whole is softened by an almost Christ-like mildness.

In another paragraph Byam Martin says : ' I have often heard Riou reprobate in the strongest terms the idea of a captain of a man-of-war forsaking his ship to save his own life, while a single man remained behind to whom he could by possibility be useful, or indeed under any circumstances to quit a ship in distress and leave his crew to perish. It would be impossible, he would say, that an officer in command could so far forget his duty.'

This statement is interesting in that it suggests that the practice of the captain being the last to leave his ship was not, at that time, an accepted naval tradition. Also it is the kind of affirmation of high principle which many men make during their lives, yet which few are called on to perform.

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On April 1st, 1789, Riou received his Admiralty appointment to take command of the *Guardian*, and a few days later he commissioned her. The next two months were employed in taking on board stores and provisions, including an immense quantity of salted meat, 'wheelbarrows, wagons and carts,' and a large consignment of plants. These last, packed in 93 pots, were housed in a specially constructed coach or conservatory on the quarter-deck, and included '17 different sets of vines, besides plums, peaches, walnuts, apricots, cherries, orange and lemon trees, shaddock, two apples, almonds, figs, sage, camomile and many other culinary herbs.' The whole cargo amounted to 1,003 tons.

On July 6th, the *Guardian* sailed for Spithead. During the next

#### THE VOYAGE OF THE GUARDIAN

two months more stores and provisions were taken on board and the ship completed her complement. This consisted of a ship's company of 88 men (plus two 'Widow's Men')<sup>1</sup> and 40 supernumeraries made up as follows :

'The Boatswain's boy, who had been indented to him as an apprentice, a Mr. Alexander, Provost-Marshal of New South Wales Colony, and his servant, 9 persons going out to superintend the convicts in the Colony, the Rev. Mr. Crowther, Chaplain to the Settlement and his servant, the daughter of one of the superintendents—a child about ten years old, and 25 convicts which were considered good farming men.'

Mr. Alexander and two superintendents left the ship before she sailed, so the total number embarked was 119. The inclusion of the convicts was an innovation since they were usually shipped out in transports. An illuminating passage on their normal wretched treatment is given by Riou in his description of their first meal. 'They could not forbear exclaiming when breakfasting on the Burgoo without butter or salt or indeed without any kind of sauce that they had not made such a meal for many a long day.'

The *Guardian* sailed from Spithead on September 12th and arrived at Santa Cruz in the Canary Islands on September 26th. Here she remained four days, taking in nearly 2,000 gallons of wine for the colony at Port Jackson. The onward passage to the Cape was uneventful : yet because of Riou's curiosity in everything that concerned the ship, his *Personal Log* is seldom without interest. An eclipse of the moon on November 3rd gave him the opportunity for numerous calculations and observations. He records the different kinds of fish that were seen, and how one day some sharks were caught and eaten. He was much interested in a still which had been fitted on board for purifying the salt water. Consideration for his men is always evident. During the five months July to November, 1789, there were only seven floggings. And there is this revealing entry :

'Opened a cask of Essence of Malt and gave a pint of the Wort to each of the men that were in the sick List. This was done rather as an experiment to know how so valuable a beverage would be received by the Seamen than as a thing in the least necessary. I was happy to find it was drank with the greatest pleasure by them.'

<sup>1</sup> Non-existent seamen entered on the books, whose wages helped a fund for poor widows.



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'This experiment may be thought to have been trifling and unnecessary by those who are not well acquainted with the strange and unaccountable caprice of a Sailor; but had an opinion once been adopted to dislike the Wort even in the imagination only, it would in future have been received with indifference or disgust when perhaps it might be of the most infinite service.'

The *Guardian* came to anchor in Table Bay on November 24th. Here she took on cows and horses for the colony, and on December 11th set sail to the south-eastward. The ship was now clear of all regular trade-routes, and could not expect to sight a sail until reaching the coastal waters of Australia. Each day the temperature grew colder: the mercury, which had registered at the Cape an average of 67°, had fallen by December 22nd to 49°. The same day there is this ominous entry: 'Passed by to the northward of an island of ice about four or five miles distant. I judged it to be about a mile and a half in circuit and 30 or 40 feet high. . . . We saw another soon after to the southward.'

The log which records these entries is up to midnight on December 23rd a model of neatness and legibility. But the page for the following day is scarred with blotches, stains and pencil marks; and it is evident, even without close scrutiny, that the ship had suffered a major disaster. What happened on that day is best described in extracts from Riou's Journal:

'Thursday, December 24th.

'P.M. About 5 o'clock the officer of the watch (the Gunner) came to me in my cabin and informed me that he saw an island of ice to leeward. . . . As the weather had all the appearance of clearing away and as the fog was dispersing very fast to leeward, I continued to stand towards it. In approaching it, every favourable circumstance presented itself to induce me to go near enough to examine if there were any loose pieces of ice floating about the main body of this island that I could procure in order to increase my stock of fresh water, the daily consumption of which by the cattle being great.'

The *Guardian* approached to within  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile of the iceberg, and Riou sent away the cutter and jolly-boat to pick up the loose pieces. He was about to lower the second cutter also, 'but finding the fog did not disperse so fast as I had imagined it would, I desisted and thought it was sufficient to look after the two boats that were out.'

As soon as these were loaded, they started back to the ship. But the fog was now thicker, so Riou took the *Guardian* down to them. It took nearly an hour for the boats to be hoisted inboard and the sails to be set. All this time the iceberg could just be seen through patches in the fog about two miles away.

The *Guardian* was put about and laid on her course. For the next quarter of an hour Riou remained at the binnacle while the master, Mr. Clements, attended to the trimming of the sails. During this time the ship was steering E.S.E. at a speed of between six and seven knots. Satisfied that the iceberg was abaft the beam, Riou went down to his cabin to drink some tea which had been prepared by Mr. Farquharson, the purser. They were joined by Mr. Clements, who remained some twenty minutes and then returned to the deck.

'About ten minutes after this, while Mr. Farquharson and I were in conversation, I heard the helm move instantaneously with unaccustomed velocity to one side or the other. I immediately ran upon deck, and as the fog was now very thick, I made my way, without stopping to ask any questions, along the weather gangway in order to discern the danger that threatened us and which I saw depicted in the countenance of everyone I saw. On the gangway I met Mr. Clements coming aft. To him I said: "The helm must be put down," though I did not know how it was at that time (I said this because I saw no danger either on the weather beam or weather bow). He answered, "No, Sir, the helm must be put up." I did not stop a second but ran forward to convince myself at once; but I had not proceeded above a few steps when I saw by the countenances of horror which were directed on the lee bow with a cry of "Put the helm down," that I had no business forward, but immediately called to put the helm down (which was directly done) and ran aft on the quarter-deck; when I perceived, on turning my face forward, by the lee leech of the foresail a sight which will admit of no description—a body of ice full twice as high as our masthead, showing itself through the thickest fog I ever witnessed. . . . The ship at this time seemed to be entering a cavern which was large enough to receive her entirely.'

A head-on collision was avoided by the ship being caught on an underwater spur of the iceberg and thrown sideways. Riou ordered the sails to be braced about, but the ship remained stuck. 'An impending mountain,' he wrote, 'was hanging over the mizen topmast head, threatening to fall—we had observed in coming down

to the island that a constant fall took place.' After five or six agonising minutes there was a sudden shock ; and the ship began to glide once more through the water.

The relief of the crew at having escaped instant destruction was tempered by the news that the rudder had been torn away, and that there was a large hole in the bottom through which the water was entering fast. Hands were sent to the pumps, and Riou gave orders to lighten the ship. The cattle were thrown overboard, the anchors and cables, guns, water-butts and provision casks. He also suggested getting rid of the boats and booms, but on the advice of Mr. Clements, decided 'in case of the worst' to keep them.

The water, however, continued to rise, and the efforts of those at the pumps were aggravated by a gale which came on towards nightfall. Riou now divided the crew into two spells, or watches, for pumping. Each spell, as it came off duty, was given a tot of weak grog and bread and sausage. At midnight the sailmaker prepared a fothering sail, stuffed with rolls of oakum, and this was lowered under the ship's bottom and secured aft, where the leak was thought to be. 'I never left the pumps myself till daylight,' wrote Riou ; 'and no pumps, to my wonder and astonishment, were in my experience ever worked with such velocity.' Yet it was not enough. When Riou went down to the well at daybreak, there was nearly seven feet of water.

That morning, Christmas Day, a second fothering sail was made, and in the early afternoon put over the ship's bottom. Riou and several others began to clear away in the bread-room and gun-room, hoping to find out the exact position of the leak. While engaged in this, Riou got his left hand caught and badly damaged between two casks.

The pumps went round steadily all day, but the water continued to gain. That evening the gale increased, and for the first time the men began to show fatigue. 'I was reduced to that heart-aching pang,' wrote Riou, 'of endeavouring as much as possible to hide my conviction that little chance of safety remained. . . . Perhaps from great bodily strength and capability of enduring great fatigue I should have been able to have held out with the least rest, but I could no longer propose plans that promised success, and I believe no officer had anything to advance to ameliorate our situation ; so that I was reduced to the common expression of "Huzza ! Heave round !" etc, to people whose exertions had already astonished me.'

By midnight Riou confessed that he was 'fairly knocked up.' He had had no sleep for at least thirty hours, his hand was badly damaged, and he had been hard at work ever since the accident : furthermore he knew that the ship was doomed. Yet he had already accepted whatever lay ahead. 'Though my mind began to be aware of the dreadful consequences that must ensue, without vanity I may say that I was fully prepared for my own departure ; but the scenes which figured themselves to me of what must be taking place in the minds of the people . . . made me at this instant willing to be the only one lost to have saved the rest.'

During the early hours of the next morning Riou and Mr. Clements again went below. The water was still gaining. It was up to the deck-head beams in the magazine and over the orlop beams in the bread-room. They agreed that there was no hope of safety left.

On return to his cabin Riou found a deputation of seamen awaiting him. 'They now saw that they could do no more, and that it was needless to continue pumping ; the leak constantly gained . . . and seeing no possibility of saving the ship, demanded the boats.' Riou pointed out that the boats offered little more chance of safety than the ship ; and in any case they could not hold all the people. However he would have them prepared provided they went on pumping a little longer in the hope the weather would abate.

They pumped for another two hours, but the water still rose. Riou then ordered Clements to prepare the boats for sea. He himself retired to his cabin. 'How to proceed in this business, I knew not, and, which I only thought to be my duty, I wished to avoid the sight of a separation so dreadful and a scene which I foresaw would be so tragical.' His servant entered and asked him which boat he would be going in. Riou replied that, whatever happened, he would remain in the ship. This was no idle boast. 'The commander,' wrote the boatswain afterwards, 'said he would sooner go down in the ship than quid hur.' And another officer wrote : 'He was intreated and even supplicated to give up this fatal resolution and try for safety in the boats. It was even hinted to him how highly criminal it was to persevere in such a determination ; but he was not to be moved by any intreaties.'

Riou then sat down at his desk and wrote to the Admiralty the following letter which, in its certainty of approaching death and

LUDOVIC KENNEDY

triumphant conquest of the spirit over it, echoes Nelson's farewell prayer before Trafalgar.

'SIR,

'If ever any part of the officers or crew of the *Guardian* should ever survive to get home, I have only to say their conduct after the fatal stroke against an Island of Ice was admirable and wonderful in everything that related to their duties, considered either as private men or His Majesty's Service.

'As there seems to be no possibility of my remaining many hours in this world, I beg leave to recommend to the consideration of the Admiralty a sister who, if my conduct or services should be found deserving any memory, their favour might be shown to her, together with a widowed mother.'

Riou's servant now re-entered and told him that he ought to come on deck as he felt sure it would require his presence to keep order there. Riou went on deck and found 'everybody prepared for a far different voyage than what I foresaw must be made.' The junior officers had put on their best uniforms, the men as many of their clothes as they could carry. Provisions had been stacked on deck, but few were being put in the boats. Some of the men had broken into the spirit-room and were drunk. One had put on Riou's new cocked hat, his sword and two of his uniform coats.

The boats were now lowered into the sea. Owing to panic one of them broke away from the falls and was swamped. Mr. Clements and Mr. Farquharson, Mr. Crowther the Chaplain, Mr. Somerville the Gunner, and several other officers and men embarked in the launch. 'I offered my last blessing to Clements,' wrote Riou, 'that he might reach some port in safety. I knew from his good officer-like conduct that it was hardly possible that any boat but the one he might be in could be saved.' The jolly-boat, heavily overloaded, put off without provisions, water, compass or quadrant, and rowed over to the launch for assistance. Clements handed them a spare quadrant, on which they tried to board the launch. The crew of the launch resisted, and managed to hoist the sail. The jolly-boat then sank. The small cutter also got away, but as there were only seven men in her, were ordered by Clements to return to the ship for more. This they refused to do.

The large cutter got some distance from the ship and then returned. At this time Riou was exhorting the remainder of the

#### THE VOYAGE OF THE *GUARDIAN*

crew to return to the pumps, saying (which he himself did not believe) that there was still some hope of saving the ship. When the cutter came near he saw that most of her crew were drunk. The man at the helm called out that they had lost their sails and wanted another. He 'uttered dreadful imprecations' to any of the crew who tried to take the boat alongside the ship, and shouted to the *Guardian* that he would only take on board those who gave him a sail. Seeing Riou, he said that he would take him in. Riou refused, and the man called for another officer. Mr. Harvey agreed to embark, but while the boat was alongside to fetch him, about twenty men jumped from the *Guardian* into the cutter. 'It seems,' wrote Riou, 'that they had not a single thing in this boat to eat or drink, and she was loaded as full of men as she could hold. If these men lived out the day, it was the utmost, indeed I am inclined to think they could have survived but a few minutes.'

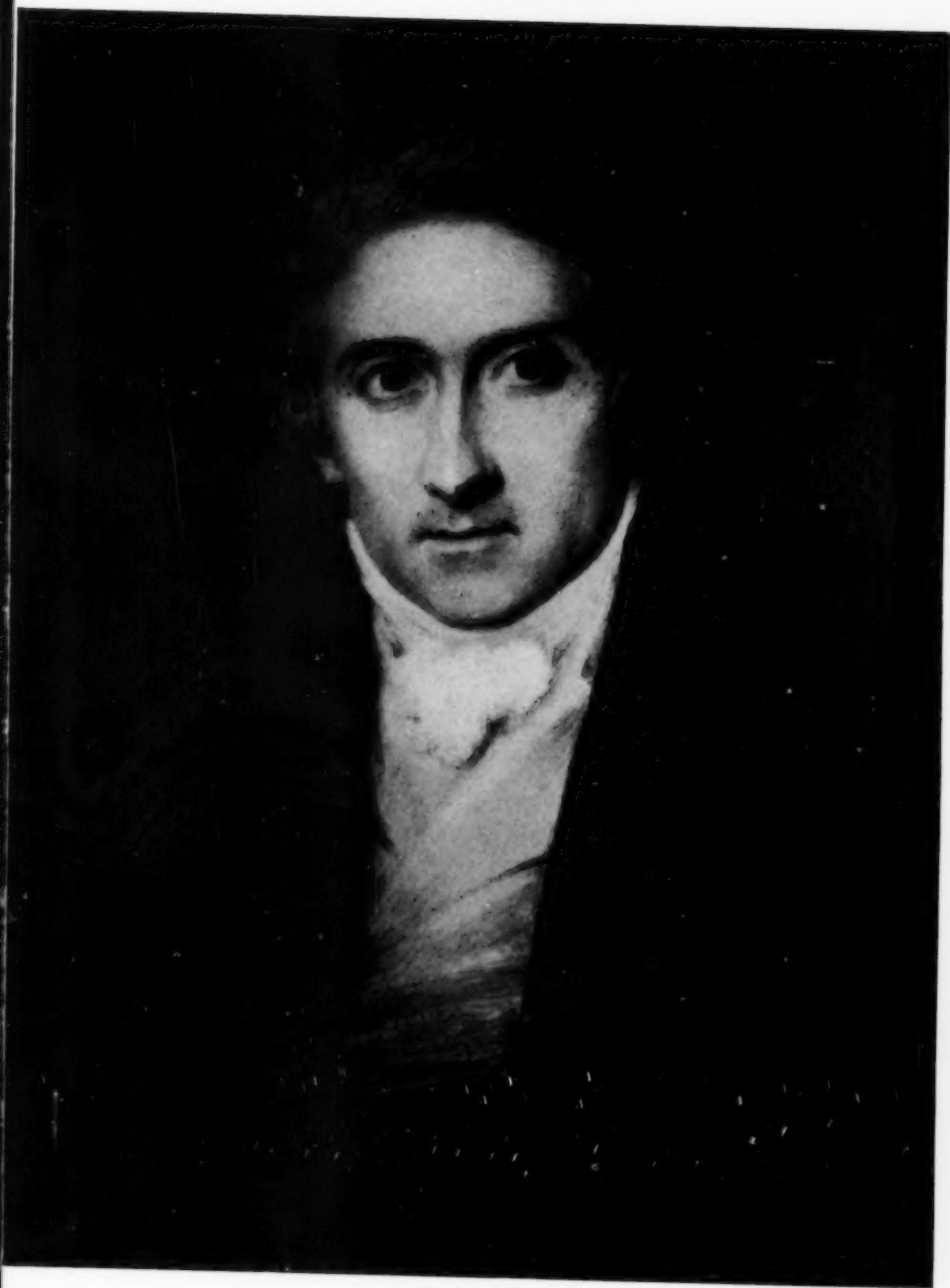
So in this wild waste of waters, surrounded by icebergs, and fifteen hundred miles from the nearest inhabited land, the *Guardian* and her boats parted company. Nobody in the ship held out any hopes for the safety of those in the boats; and nobody in the boats thought it would be long before the *Guardian* foundered.

\* \* \*

Under the command of Mr. Clements the launch ploughed northwards all that day through heavy seas. 'We were,' wrote one of the fifteen men aboard her, 'this night very much numbed and chilled with cold, and could get no sleep.' In the early hours of the morning the weather moderated, and they set more sail. A small tobacco canister was put aside for the distribution of fresh water. It was agreed that each man should have two gills a day. The food was also rationed. At midday a small goose was divided into fifteen equal parts. One of the men was blindfolded and, as he called out each of the survivors by name, another man distributed their portion.

The following day, the 28th, they began to feel the lack of water. When the first gill was distributed after the mid-day meal, one man asked to have his evening gill also. Clements forbade it; so the man 'had recourse to salt water, of which he drank freely.' During the afternoon it became quite hot, and the lips of many of the men broke out in ulcerous blisters. Their torments were aggravated by the sight of sea-birds flying near the boat, from which they could have obtained moisture. They had plenty of powder and shot but





EDWARD RIOU

*From a Miniature by Samuel Shelley in the possession of Major George Benson*

## R. N. S. Guardian

M. R. Z. Courses Winds Weather Hrs. Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> December -

1	5	SE	SE	fresh breeze & high from W
2	5			
3	5			
4	6	SE	SE	3 <sup>rd</sup> & heavy
5	8	SE	SE	at 4 <sup>th</sup> hour, heavy dead calm, with the rain in night.
6	4			
7				

At 10<sup>th</sup> M. J. A. wind  
at 5<sup>th</sup> hour S. & sea  
at 5<sup>th</sup> hour S. - have too, with out Head at  
at 5<sup>th</sup> hour S. - have too, with out Head at  
at 5<sup>th</sup> hour S. - have too, with out Head at  
at 5<sup>th</sup> hour S. - have too, with out Head at

At 23<sup>rd</sup> PM. at 10<sup>th</sup> hour.  
Spoke off with wind NE.  
Head NW.

at 24<sup>th</sup> 43° 40' S. 41° 45' E

Course 1/2 S. to 1/2 S. 1/2 S. 1/2 S.

25<sup>th</sup> Course 1/2 S. to 1/2 S. 1/2 S. 1/2 S.

26<sup>th</sup> Course 1/2 S. to 1/2 S. 1/2 S. 1/2 S.

27<sup>th</sup> Course East 30° to 1/2 S. 1/2 S. 1/2 S.

28<sup>th</sup> Course SE 15° to 1/2 S. 1/2 S. 1/2 S.

29<sup>th</sup> Course S. E. 15° to 1/2 S. 1/2 S. 1/2 S.

30<sup>th</sup> Course S. E. 15° to 1/2 S. 1/2 S. 1/2 S.

31<sup>st</sup> Course S. E. 15° to 1/2 S. 1/2 S. 1/2 S.

32<sup>nd</sup> Course S. E. 15° to 1/2 S. 1/2 S. 1/2 S.

33<sup>rd</sup> Course S. E. 15° to 1/2 S. 1/2 S. 1/2 S.

34<sup>th</sup> Course S. E. 15° to 1/2 S. 1/2 S. 1/2 S.

35<sup>th</sup> Course S. E. 15° to 1/2 S. 1/2 S. 1/2 S.

36<sup>th</sup> Course S. E. 15° to 1/2 S. 1/2 S. 1/2 S.

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38<sup>th</sup> Course S. E. 15° to 1/2 S. 1/2 S. 1/2 S.

39<sup>th</sup> Course S. E. 15° to 1/2 S. 1/2 S. 1/2 S.

40<sup>th</sup> Course S. E. 15° to 1/2 S. 1/2 S. 1/2 S.

41<sup>st</sup> Course S. E. 15° to 1/2 S. 1/2 S. 1/2 S.

42<sup>nd</sup> Course S. E. 15° to 1/2 S. 1/2 S. 1/2 S.

43<sup>rd</sup> Course S. E. 15° to 1/2 S. 1/2 S. 1/2 S.

44<sup>th</sup> Course S. E. 15° to 1/2 S. 1/2 S. 1/2 S.

45<sup>th</sup> Course S. E. 15° to 1/2 S. 1/2 S. 1/2 S.

46<sup>th</sup> Course S. E. 15° to 1/2 S. 1/2 S. 1/2 S.

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55<sup>th</sup> Course S. E. 15° to 1/2 S. 1/2 S. 1/2 S.

56<sup>th</sup> Course S. E. 15° to 1/2 S. 1/2 S. 1/2 S.

Course  
Distance  
Lat. & Lon.  
Long. & Lat.

At 10<sup>th</sup> hour, told me he had  
seen the boat - at 10<sup>th</sup> hour  
at 10<sup>th</sup> hour, told me he had  
seen the boat - at 10<sup>th</sup> hour

Light from the  
Lighthouse -  
at 10<sup>th</sup> hour, told me he had  
seen the boat - at 10<sup>th</sup> hour  
at 10<sup>th</sup> hour, told me he had  
seen the boat - at 10<sup>th</sup> hour

At 10<sup>th</sup> hour, told me he had  
seen the boat - at 10<sup>th</sup> hour

THE CAPTAIN'S LOG OF H.M.S. 'GUARDIAN'

December 24, 1789 and days following. In the possession of Major George Benson

no weapons except pistols ; and ' we were unable to do any execution with them.'

The next day they cut up and ate the last of their fresh food, a chicken. That morning there was a rainstorm. ' We endeavoured to benefit as much as possible, by facing the weather with our mouths open and our handkerchiefs spread out ; but the drifting moisture was so thin and light that we were barely able to catch sufficient to wet our lips.'

On the fourth day their thirst was very bad. ' We could not eat the smallest crumb till supplied with an additional measure of water to moisten our lips which were almost held together by a tough, viscid phlegm.' The butter, cheese and hams were made free for anyone's use ; but they were so salty that they remained untouched. In desperation several men drank quantities of seawater, which did not seem to have any harmful effect. This was due, though probably none of them realised it, to the amount of fresh water given off by the melting icebergs. (It is now, I believe, a well-known fact that in seas frequented by icebergs, the water contains so little salt that it can be drunk with impunity.)

On New Year's Eve the crew were at their lowest ebb. It was so hot that each man was allowed an extra portion of water, without which he could have had no food at all. A little rain fell in the afternoon, but they collected hardly any of it. Many drank more salt water, others their own urine. Some had become so dispirited that they began showing disrespect to their officers. ' This however was happily checked in time by the spirited conduct of the gunner, who chastised the leader in the face of the whole crew and restored discipline.'

During the next two days the people continued to suffer from thirst and exposure, but the boat made good headway. On January 2nd, Mr. Clements took a sight which gave him a position of 33.19.S and 34.15.E. This meant that the launch was within a day or two's sailing from the east African coast, and had covered nearly a thousand miles since leaving the *Guardian*—an astonishing effort in view of the privations endured, and a great tribute to Clements's seamanship and discipline.' That evening there was another gale and very high seas, accompanied by thunder and lightning. Clements and Somerville took watch and watch at the helm, and it was only because of their experience and judgment that the boat got safely through.

At daylight on the morning of January 3rd, while the seas were

still very high, the gunner, then at the helm, suddenly saw a ship a little distance away, lying under bare poles. 'Our joy was great beyond expectations.' Despite the seas, the launch put on more sail and between five and six came alongside the ship. She was the *Vicomtesse de Britannie*, a French merchantmen bound from the Île de France (now Mauritius) to Europe via the Cape of Good Hope. 'The people on board crowded immediately to our assistance, and received us in the most friendly manner.'

So ended the endeavour of the *Guardian's* launch. A fortnight later the *Vicomtesse de Britannie* arrived at the Cape of Good Hope, and soon afterwards the survivors embarked for England. Here they told of everything that had happened, and Riou's farewell letter was handed to the Secretary of the Admiralty. No one doubted that the ship had foundered, a belief which, as the months passed, as spring turned to summer and summer to autumn, resolved into certainty. The survivors of the launch dispersed to their homes, the relatives of those left on board exchanged hopes for memories; and the ship was officially listed as lost.

\* \* \*

The prospects that faced Riou when, on that Boxing Day morning, the *Guardian's* boats had disappeared into the mist, were not encouraging. Of a ship's company of 119 embarked at Spithead, only 61 remained. These consisted of two midshipmen, Mr. Pitt (a great-nephew of Lord Chatham), and Mr. Gilmore, Mr. Gore, master's mate, Mr. Williams, boatswain, Mr. Sampson, carpenter, Mr. Fairclough, surgeon's mate, Messrs. Schafer, Divine and Hume, superintendents of convicts, Elizabeth Schafer (the child mentioned earlier), thirty seamen and twenty-one convicts. There were therefore no senior officers left in the ship. The water was still rising, and the ship was unmanageable and without steerage way. Many of the men were drunk; and when Riou went down to his cabin he found his pistols, swords, silver buckles and watches gone, and an old seaman quietly taking his breeches. 'It was hardly time to be a disciplinarian,' he wrote, 'when only a few more hours of life presented themselves; but this behaviour greatly hurt me.'

Most of the crew hoped that, given some luck, the ship might reach one of the islands in the Prince Edward Island Group. But Riou knew that these islands, although perhaps not more than two hundred miles away, contained little vegetation or animal life; and that a longer and more agonising death awaited them there

than if the ship suddenly foundered. He therefore resolved, providing he could keep the ship afloat, to make his way back north-westwards in the direction of the Cape of Good Hope or Madagascar. 'In the present situation,' he wrote, 'perhaps 50 years might elapse and no ship ever come.'

There were two considerations in his mind; to stop the leak from gaining, and, as the rudder had been torn away, to make something to steer by. He therefore reassigned the crew into watches for pumping, and with the help of the carpenter made another fothering sail, consisting of pieces of sail patched with the crew's blankets and bedding. A steering machine was also made and let over the stern in place of the rudder.

During the next forty-eight hours the water continued slowly to rise; and the efforts of the crew were aggravated by the pumps constantly breaking and having to be repaired. By December 28th the water had risen above the orlop deck to within two feet of the gun-deck. The makeshift rudder had proved useless and the ship was wallowing in the water at the mercy of wind and sea. It seemed as though this process must go on until the ship, unable to bear the weight of water any longer, suddenly foundered. The crew, thinking that it was only a matter of hours before this happened, asked permission to build a raft. Riou, 'willing to give into any of their measures to keep up their spirits' granted the request, although he knew it would be useless.

The next afternoon the situation was slightly more encouraging. 'Hopes!' wrote Riou in his journal. 'Gained four feet since the morning . . .' (The night before he had written, 'Hopes had I none . . .') These hopes were diminished next morning by the news that what had been gained had since been lost. However the water did not rise any nearer the gun-deck beams, and by alternately losing and gaining it looked as though it might be possible to keep the rise checked.

By December 30th the crew were so exhausted by pumping that Riou made a more regular plan for their relief:

'I now formed them into three spells for the chain pump for the night, and as everybody had been constantly wet and cold, I mixed ostrich's eggs and rum together and ordered some pigs to be killed and fowls that were about the deck. I likewise ordered tea and sugar of which there was abundance to be ready always at 4 o'clock in the morning, at 8 and at 4 in the afternoon. I was convinced this warm drink would keep them from desiring much liquor.'

The rise was now checked, and the ship began to make a little headway through the water. During the following days Riou had much to occupy him. In addition to the technical problems of keeping the ship afloat, pointing her head in the right direction, fitting a new rudder and supervising the working of the pumps—enough to tax the exertions of any man—there was the conduct of the crew. As soon as they had gained on the leak, they began to slacken. Many had stolen casks from the flooded spirit-room and were often found drunk and incapable of duty. Others, when they ought to have been pumping, were found sleeping in the coach. The superintendents of the convicts were particularly useless, and spent most of the time idling in the garden-house.

On New Year's Day one of the midshipmen told Riou that the crew were openly mutinous. He had heard them say that the captain was out of his senses, that he wanted to die and that the ship was steering the wrong way. One man had said: "And then let's heave him overboard!" On January 3rd a seaman told Riou that there was a sail on the horizon: Riou rushed on deck and found instead two seagulls. On the 7th another man threatened him with violence. Riou raised his arm to strike him, but the man's friend, standing by, put out his own arm to protect him, and Riou's right hand was broken in the middle bone. On another occasion someone threw something at him.

By the middle of January the ship was making appreciable headway through the water. She was heavily down by the stern but the leak had not gained any further, and by regular pumping and baling they were able to keep it checked. The masts and sails had been repaired, and a small sail was rigged to steer by (all efforts at making a rudder had been unsuccessful). The crew were more cheerful. 'By this time,' wrote Riou on January 30th, 'I had convinced them by my conduct that safety more depended on my exertions than in any of their own. They had for some time given over forming schemes and were, I believe, convinced that mine were the best.' The ring-leader of the mutineers was 'sent to Coventry.'—'No one spoke to or ate with him.'

But no sooner had Riou restored the discipline of his men than he had another problem to contend with—their health. The continual standing in sea-water, combined with exhaustion and lack of fresh food, had brought on scurvy and ulcers. When the last of the stallions was killed, nobody had the strength to throw them overboard. Riou turned the garden-house into a sick-bay,



the only place which was dry and warm, and there allowed the worst afflicted to lie for twelve to twenty-four hours, drinking tea, hot wine and spices. Longer than this he did not allow them, for prolonged relaxation brought on perspirations and fever. He also opened two casks of vinegar and kraut which he ate himself and told the crew they were welcome to take whenever they chose. In all this, said Riou, he had no assistance from 'the poor young man who was the surgeon's mate.'

So the days and weeks passed ; and in spite of all the privations and difficulties, Riou, by his genius, kept the crew at their tasks and the *Guardian* on her course. In spite of his damaged hands he took sights regularly, and these showed that little by little the ship was approaching the coast of Africa. Yet although Riou trusted his latitude, he could never be very certain of his longitude, as without a proper rudder he could not keep the ship's head 'within five or six points.' At the end of January, he thought they might fetch up at Mauritius or Réunion : later he felt Madagascar more likely ; and later still the coast of Natal. On February 8th he began marking the ship's track on the chart. 'I could have no foreknowledge of what was to happen and therefore as every day's work was marked down, my ideas altered—yet always dreading the consequence of a wreck.'

On February 18th he knew for certain that his great voyage was about to come to an end. His sights gave him a position close in to the south-eastern coast of South Africa ; and the proximity of land was confirmed by the arrival of large numbers of gannets which began circling the ship. On February 20th he took an observation from which he reckoned that at midnight the ship had passed by Cape Agulhas (the most southerly cape on the African continent) about fifteen miles distant. The next day he wrote in his journal this triumphant entry : 'When sitting down in my cabin over my après, James told me at 11 they saw the land. I went to the forecastle and the starboard weather bow. I saw it directly and, thank God, it was the only land I knew on the coast, it was the Cape of Good Hope ! The ship's head running right for it.'

There could hardly have been a more dramatic or fitting end to the *Guardian's* nine-week voyage. By his fortitude, seamanship and leadership, Riou had brought his ship and all in her safe back to the exact place which he had intended. Two days later the ship was beached in Table Bay ; and Riou wrote at once to his mother :

THE VOYAGE OF THE *GUARDIAN*

‘DEAREST,

‘God has been merciful! I hope you will have no fatal accounts of the *Guardian*. I am safe, I am well, notwithstanding you may hear otherwise.

‘Join with me in prayer to that blessed Saviour who hath hung over my ship for two months and kept thy dear son safe, and to be, I hope, thankful for a miracle.’

\* \* \*

When the ‘*Guardian*’ was examined, two large holes were discovered in her keel. These had let in a huge quantity of water, but had also washed out nearly all the iron and shingle ballast. The ship had been made further buoyant by the casks in the waterlogged hold pressing against the lower deck planks; so that for most of her journey she had been little more than a floating raft.

There is little news of Riou during the next ten years; but in 1801 he sailed with Hyde Parker’s fleet for the Baltic as senior officer, frigates. Although unknown to most officers in the fleet, he made an instant impression on them. One described him as ‘the most god-like mortal I ever viewed.’

Riou’s squadron was part of the force selected by Nelson for the attack on Copenhagen; and his conduct in the battle was largely responsible for victory. Seeing the formidable Three Crowns Battery not engaged owing to early casualties in the line of battle, he took his squadron to attack it without waiting for orders. Later Hyde Parker hoisted the signal for withdrawal. Riou saw Nelson repeat it, but failed to observe his signal for close action was kept flying. As the frigates turned away, the battery poured in several broadsides. ‘Come then, my boys,’ Riou is reported to have said, ‘let us all die together.’ He was killed a moment later.

Riou’s death was felt acutely throughout the fleet. Nelson spoke of him as ‘the gallant and good Captain Riou,’ a phrase which Campbell later incorporated in his famous poem. And Southey wrote: ‘Except it had been Nelson himself, the British Navy could not have suffered a severer loss.’

## *Over the Plain*

BY MARY VOYLE

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THE girl in the blue jersey pedalled along the windy fenceless road, insensible to any material discomfort, to strained leg muscles or the galling, indurated leather of a cheap bicycle saddle. Even her visual sense did no more than register on the surface of her mind the well-known monotony of the plain. Her consciousness was entirely occupied with words which had become a ritual chant from constant repetition, their affective meaning so thoroughly sucked out of them that nothing remained but a kind of rune, and to the rhythm of this she cycled, unhampered by the natural demands of the landscape for her attention and appreciation, unencumbered by the impedimenta of emotion. The chant contained two sentences which, if repeated one after the other, proved unrhythmic, so the girl had separated them, and repeated several times first one and then the other. 'Come over the plain and see me whenever you feel inclined,' was one. The other was short: 'I like the sound of you.'

The girl was eighteen years old, thin and wiry in build and untidy of appearance. Rather a hoyden, you might say, rather a scarecrow. She was aware of her clumsiness, but it was only occasionally that it caused her any unhappiness or embarrassment. She made a virtue of it. Her tough, stringy frame enabled her to stride for miles over a countryside she loved; to cycle up hills which lay round her own village, or across the open plain, as today, in the teeth of a wind that drove her breath back into her throat. Her sinewy legs pressed resolutely on the pedals and the steady pulse of the wheels exhilarated her and filled her with a sense of well-being. On this day, the enclosed hills and wooded valleys of her home would have been stifling. She had ridden out of the hedges into the open grassland with relief. Looking back at the village which she could still see quite clearly, a new thought came into her mind and heightened her excitement, so that she involuntarily thrust her feet against the pedals with increased pressure and the bicycle leapt forward like a spurred horse.

#### OVER THE PLAIN

'What's that you are reading, Alison?' her family would ask.

'Oh, it's Sheila Malet's latest novel. She lent it to me.' That would be her reply. 'She lent it to me.'

She could hear her family's cries of amazement. Sheila Malet, the famous novelist, was the object of Alison's pilgrimage across these uplands, but she had not acquainted her family with the fact. She had never mentioned at home what an impact Sheila Malet had made upon her mind. She had only read two of her books and not fully understood those, but she felt herself irresistibly drawn to this writer by an imagined affinity with her, an affinity based partly upon the vivid, emotionally-realised descriptions of the country which she had herself known all her childhood, and loved with a devotion and ardour which she had never yet accorded to any human being, and partly upon her own aspirations as writer. That the landscape in Sheila Malet's novels was less a setting than a screen for the action of the characters had eluded the youthful innocence of her eye. The verbal painting, accurate, indeed inspired, as much of it was, hung between the reader and the characters, like the woodland drop scene painted on gauze behind which the figures of a ballet weave mysteriously, their actions and the significance of their actions veiled from the audience, who can see that they move but, until the veil is lifted, cannot grasp the exact pattern of the dance.

On Alison's left the even line of the horizon was broken by a grass-covered mound on the top of which lay the crumbling ruins of a small castle, built on the edge of the plain to protect the entrance to the valley from which the girl had recently emerged. Alone on this vast upland expanse, the castle possessed a forlorn melancholy, but none of the grandeur, the hint of nobler days, which still hangs about ruins even as crumbling as Ludlow or Clun. Here on the plain, a ruined castle appeared to the traveller ambiguous and a little foolish, but not to the girl, to whom it was as familiar as her own hearth. She stopped pedalling, dismounted from her cycle and sat down on the verge, to gaze at this solitary relic of a lost age which had survived the harrow and the plough. The emotion which she felt so strongly over certain places dear to her, suffused her heart with warmth now, but added to this quite familiar sensation was something new and indefinable—a cold tremor of excitement at the very heart of the warmth. She was a solitary child, and it was here and to other similar ancient remains, entrenchments, relics of Roman civilisation, and decaying

masonry of indeterminate mediaeval period in which her county abounded, that she always came to play her solitary games, games in which the other characters in their historical trappings had been supplied by her imagination. These games were so satisfying to her that by the time she was eighteen she had given up much attempt to interest herself in living beings, and indeed resented having to make the effort of adjusting herself to the demands of those around her. She felt a creature apart. Too old now to utilise her creations for the purposes of play, she turned to writing down her fantasies, weak in human interest but filled with the minute observation and painstaking detail of the enthusiast. This relic of a castle was a scene for the story which had aroused the interest of the great Sheila Malet, to whom Alison had sent it, secure in her conviction that no one but a fellow writer could appreciate her literary aspirations. Not till after she had sent it did she fully realise the human implications of what she had done. There would be a response—or there would not be a response. In either case her own feelings were involved and she was shocked and disturbed by them. From being an impersonal purveyor of golden words, Sheila Malet became an alarming creature of flesh and blood, with all those human powers of snubbing, or condescending, or ignoring, which made Alison distrust and dislike the company of grown-ups. When Miss Malet's reply came, she could hardly bear to open it, and left it in her pocket for the whole morning. After lunch, she had cycled out desperately to Caesar's Camp, a wooded entrenchment not far from her home, and there, lying in one of the fosses on a springy bed of beech mast, she had read the letter.

'Your story is interesting. I hope you will write more.' This Miss Malet had written and then those words which she had repeated so often that now their meaning by-passed her brain and thrust straight at her emotions: 'Come over the plain and see me whenever you feel inclined. I like the sound of you.' She lay so long absorbing the words that the beech husks had hooked themselves on to her coat and she returned home wearing a kind of rusty chainmail.

It was now nearly two months since she had had the letter. It took her some time to make up her mind to accept the invitation to go and see the novelist. Lying on the grass now, under the castle walls, she tried to imagine the coming interview but the present influences were too strong for her. The walls rose battlemented

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and flagged into the blue sky, the shrill of the birds blared like trumpets, and as she jumped on her bicycle and pedalled off once more, she found herself, with a slight blush at her childishness, slipping easily into the old game of imagining her bicycle a war-horse and herself a knight, riding off from the castle to join his lord in some affray. The tall, old-fashioned frame shuddered beneath her as she bounced on the saddle, her right arm couching an imaginary lance.

The village where Miss Malet lived was unknown to Alison, but the map had shown her that it lay in a protected hollow on the north-east side of the plain, a small valley watered by the river Fran which flowed from her own hills. She would tell Miss Malet that, she thought. It would be a conversational opening. Now that she was approaching Franbridge, she felt a growing reluctance to end the solitude of her ride. What would Miss Malet look like? Compelled to face one of her ideas made flesh, the girl began to experience an uneasiness. How would she herself look to the glorious Miss Malet? She had not bothered to put on her best clothes even for this afternoon of afternoons. Largely to avoid exciting the attention of her father and mother, she had gone out in her old skirt and blue jersey. Her shoes, she now noticed, had not been cleaned for some time. Her hair was tangled with the wind and she had brought no comb. The thoughts assembling in her mind retarded her progress in a way that no physical obstacle, no wind or gradient, could do. She dismounted at a slight incline and, leaning heavily over the handle-bars, trudged up it as though a burden were at her back and weary miles of ascending road before her. But this somewhat conventional regret at her own social shortcomings was soon elbowed into insignificance by the much more alarming proportions of Miss Malet's corporeal presence, now assuming conjectural shape to her inward eye.

For so long it had been purely her own reactions to Miss Malet which had preoccupied her. She had taken the real person of the novelist for granted much as she took the plain and its undulations, ridges, and cold, shaded hollows, content to enjoy the pleasurable sensation which they afforded without analysing what it was in that pattern of curves and planes, of varying greens patched with cloud shadows, that caused her pleasure. As she drew nearer and nearer the village and her progress grew slower, her mind became more abstracted from her surroundings and



found at last an exclusive occupation in the rehearsal of a conversation with the imagined figure of Miss Malet.

'Come in, Alison,' said the figure, a tall, slender woman, well-dressed (for Miss Malet, she thought, must be well off). Bitterly, the girl looked down at her dirty shoes and thick stockings. Why had she not thought all this out before? Miss Malet would recognise her for the hobbledehoy she was and would despise her. Worst of all, she would be disappointed in her. Yes, that was the worst of all, that the young, promising writer should disappoint Miss Malet.

'You're not at all as I imagined.' That is what the novelist would say—no more, for she would not wish to wound her feelings, but that implied criticism would be enough.

'I didn't want to dress up specially. You see, I had to cycle over here and my best clothes would have got messed up.'

Wouldn't Sheila Malet say, 'Why didn't you come by train, then?'

'It costs too much money. When I've written a novel and become famous I'll be able to afford it.'

The conversation was over its creaking start and flowed more easily. The pace of the bicycle quickened.

'You'll be famous one day if you go on as you are . . . of course, you've got a lot to learn.'

'I know I have.'

'How old are you?'

'Just eighteen. I've left school.'

'And what are you going to do?'

'I'm going to live at home for a while and of course I'm going to write.'

'Would you like to come and stay with me for a bit and do some bottle-washing for me? There are things I could teach you.'

Alison was now cycling with breathless energy. A stone in the road threw her for a moment off her balance and jolted her back into consciousness of her immediate surroundings. She was among cottages, the outskirts of Franbridge. She must find out where Miss Malet lived. Still carried on the impetus of her thoughts, eager and confident, she felt she had only to keep the conversation going in her mind for Miss Malet to pick it up lightly when they met, like a rider who leaps to the stirrup of a horse already circling in the ring. She asked the way of a passing villager.

'Oh, she?' he said, and spat. 'Down there.' He shrugged

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a vague shoulder and slouched away. She turned down the lane he had indicated and found the cottage easily enough. She wheeled her bicycle to the gate. A figure in a brown overall was bending over a flowerbed and looked up at the click of the latch.

'Hullo,' said the figure, casually. 'Who are you?'

'I'm Alison Birkwell,' said the girl.

'Alison Birkwell? Good Lord, I'd forgotten you were coming.' The figure straightened itself up and walked slowly over the lawn towards her. Sheila Malet. The girl stared at her and fiddled with her handlebars.

'Am I a nuisance? I mean—if you weren't expecting me—perhaps you'd rather—' Red in the face, she lowered her voice to a mutter and only the first few of her words reached the ear of the novelist.

'Of course you're not a nuisance,' she said, critically surveying her visitor. 'Good heavens, it's nearly four. Come along and we'll forage for some tea.'

In the kitchen, the friendliness engendered by getting a meal together put out of the girl's head the careful conversation she had rehearsed on the road.

'That cup's dirty, my dear. Give it a swill under the tap.'

'What about a saucer for it, Miss Malet?'

'They're on the dresser. Behind the newspapers. And there's a pot of jam there, too. We'll have that.'

'There isn't much jam in it.'

'Greedy young woman, aren't you? All right. You'll find some more in that cupboard over there.'

The girl opened the cupboard door and an array of tins, pots and jars confronted her. The necessity of having to make a choice interrupted the smooth running of her thoughts and as she stood undecided between gooseberry or melon and ginger, she suddenly became vividly aware of her extraordinary position. She was standing in the kitchen of Sheila Malet, the eminent novelist, selecting jam out of her cupboard, and washing up cups in the sink, as though they were old cronies. She turned and looked with curiosity at the writer who was standing at the table, her back towards her, cutting vigorously into a new loaf. Sheila Malet, thought the girl. I'll remember this scene as long as I live. The woman was as untidy as she was. Her brogue shoes had not been cleaned for some time, her overall was filthy and her large bony hands were still brown with earth.

'I'm like her,' thought the girl. 'I'm like her. We neither of us care for appearances. It's what is underneath, inside that matters. And I've got it inside too. I shall write, like her. It won't matter what I wear or what manners I have. It'll be my thoughts that matter. Appearances don't count in the world I shall belong to—Sheila Malet's world.'

She became aware of a silence in the kitchen. She herself was standing at the open cupboard, her choice of jam still undecided. The novelist was at the table, the bread knife in her hand. She was doing nothing. Her eyes were staring vacantly at the spongy new loaf. For a moment the kitchen became a scene, theatrical, expectant. One might have listened for the sinister knocking at the door, or the sudden cry of terror from without to set its life in motion again.

'I wasn't expecting you, you know,' said Miss Malet slowly, looking down at the girl's shoes and wrinkled stockings.

'But—but I wrote to you.'

'Yes, you did, I know. It's my fault. I just forgot it was today, and then when you did come it put something else, rather important, out of my head. I never do know what day of the week it is. I must go and change, clean myself up.'

Not understanding her, the girl moved to check her.

'No, please, I like you as you are. Don't clean yourself, or—or anything. I like you as you are.'

Sheila Malet looked remotely at her as though she had never set eyes on her before.

'I have someone coming to see me,' she said and disappeared. A few moments later she called down the stairs in something of her earlier, friendly tones: 'I'm horribly forgetful. You'll learn that if you see much of me. Finish getting the tea, there's a dear, and take it into the sitting-room. It's on the right by the front door.'

'Is the—the person coming to tea?'

'On the London train,' replied Miss Malet.

Alison stood irresolute in the kitchen. She felt tired now and chilled with weariness from her long ride. She wanted to relax, to sit by the fire in an easy chair, drinking tea and talking, listening to Miss Malet. That is how she had thought the afternoon would be. She and Miss Malet would talk about her books and she would describe the ruined castle and how she had written round it the story which she had sent to the novelist. Together

they would dissect her story and discuss its merits and demerits. It would be a serious, revealing conversation. One writer to another.

'What did you talk about?' her family would ask her when she arrived home. She had her answer ready.

'Oh, we talked shop,' she would say. 'We talked shop.'

She carried the tea-things into the sitting-room. There was no fire. She set them out on a table, uncertain whether or not they would sit round the empty grate or in the window embrasure where the table was at present standing.

'Perhaps she's not so well off,' thought the girl, looking at the threadbare carpet and the worn easy chairs. 'Perhaps novels don't pay much and she can't afford fires in April.'

Miss Malet entered the room and Alison felt a shock of surprise at her changed appearance which dissolved the hard core of her disappointment into wonder. The novelist was wearing a frock, plain but well-cut in a style which minimised the stocky proportions of her figure. Silk stockings and new-looking shoes gave her a generally well-turned-out appearance. She had washed the earth from her hands and put on a ring, a garnet in a large old-fashioned setting. Alison turned away and looked out of the window at the garden, searching for her bearings. She felt a stranger, a sense of being lost which she had never experienced in her solitary walks and rides over the countryside. The Lombardy poplar at the gate was swinging over in the wind. She observed it with melancholy intensity and felt the tears rising in her eyes.

'I hope you're not cold,' said Miss Malet brightly.

'No, not really.'

'I'm afraid I hardly ever use this room, except when I have visitors, so I don't bother to keep the fire lit.'

'But haven't you got a visitor—you said——'

'Oh, no. Not a real visitor. She's not a visitor. She lives here. She's just been away for a while.'

'Then it's because of me?'

'Of course. You're a visitor, aren't you?'

'I'd much rather you didn't think of me like that. After reading your novels, I feel I know you . . . fairly well, at any rate,' the girl added, realising the temerity of her assertion.

'My dear, you must never judge people by what they write. It usually has nothing whatever to do with the way they live.'

The girl floundered on in the conversation. She could not see

which way she was going. She knew only that she must speak, must keep her head above the conversational waters.

'It must have something to do with what you are?'

'With what I am?' The tone was no longer defensive. It was angry. Alison stumbled on, searching for words which would convey her half-realised meaning.

'What you write is, somehow, you, I mean. It must have a kind of character, like the tone of your voice belongs to you.'

Sheila Malet lit a cigarette. The brittle atmosphere softened and relaxed in a haze of blue smoke.

'You're a strange child. What made you want to write?'

'I've always wanted to. I feel somehow different from other people.' Alison warmed to Miss Malet's interest. It is pleasant to be discussed, to be called 'strange.' She was aware of her otherness and prized it for she believed that she was born to be a writer and that she was marked off from her contemporaries. Sheila Malet's call to write had been evoked solely by her need to earn money; she could not recall ever having felt a vocation as this girl felt. She had started writing too late in life to have tasted any pleasure in her 'otherness' or to have made a virtue of it as though it were the unique and inevitable corollary of the artistic gift. She leaned forward and touched the girl lightly on her hand.

'Most of the writers I know are as dull as ditchwater and quite as ordinary,' she said. 'You shouldn't wish to be different from other people. It's not—it's not the happiest thing.'

'But I'm going to write,' cried the girl, with ardour. 'Writers are different from other people. They—they are like kings. Or magicians, perhaps. The ordinary rules of life don't apply to them. They live truly free lives.'

'And what's a truly free life?' Though it was a question, Sheila Malet put no interrogatory inflection into her voice. The words were a statement, an antiphon to which the response was unuttered. To the girl the words seemed meaningless, and she fell silent.

'Don't you want anything to eat?' she asked Miss Malet, at last, with the embarrassed protectiveness of the young towards their elders.

'No, I don't think so. You eat away. You must be hungry after your long ride. How many miles is it?'

'It's nearly fifteen.'

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'Fifteen?' Miss Malet seemed to be abstracted, to be listening not to her words but for some other sound, as one who hears music in another room and strains to hold back the heavy curtains of conversation around her in order that she may hear the sound of the notes.

'Yes, but it's nothing. I often cycle further than that.'

'Do you? Strong young woman.'

'I like being strong. It's such a wonderful country, this. I was born in it, and I've wandered about in it all my life. Were you born here? You seem to know it so well.'

She paused but the novelist made no reply. The girl did not like to repeat her question. She sat silently. The room was so quiet that she did not dare to eat or drink. The noise of her jaws, the clink of her cup would be so magnified in the empty silence. She felt an overwhelming desire to swallow. Desperately she fought down the longing, for she feared that the noise of her swallowing would sound like the scrape of a heel on a stone floor. It was extraordinary how much saliva could accumulate once she was conscious of its seeping flow. At last, unable to bear it any longer, she coughed unnaturally, put her handkerchief to her mouth and swallowed gratefully. Miss Malet's eyes, withdrawn, expectant, hooded, suddenly turned on her like a hawk's.

'Why have you stopped talking?'

'I—I didn't think you were interested.'

'Of course I am interested. I am always interested in people. Stupid of me, I thought from your letter that you were older than you are. How old are you?'

'Eighteen.'

'And you have read my novels?'

'Two of them.'

'They weren't in your school library, surely?'

'No, I got them from the public library in Franton.'

'Oh, I see. What made you pick them out?'

'I saw a review of one in the *Telegraph*.'

'A review of one—which one?'

'It was the one about Franbridge, called *The River Under My Walls*. I didn't really understand the criticism—'

'Oh, you didn't. Then what made you want to read the book? Was it just curiosity?'

The girl looked at her uncomprehendingly.

'I read it because it was about Franbridge and the plain,' she



said simply. 'And then I found another by you and I read that too. It was called *The Edge*. Really I liked it better. You see, I live over there, on the edge of the plain. Just the part you were writing about in that book.'

'How are you getting back?' asked Miss Malet. She had got up from her chair and was standing looking out into the garden, her back to Alison. 'It will be dusk soon.'

'Well, I shall bike back, as I came, I suppose.' For one moment the girl thought Miss Malet was going to ask her to stay the night and a panic seized her. She did not want to stay. She felt unsure of herself, in alien country here.

'How long will it take you?'

'About two hours, I think.'

'You ought to be starting, perhaps.'

The girl got up, almost without reluctance. She longed for release from the intolerable discomfort of conjecture, and half-realised truths. Awkwardly, she held out her hand.

'I'd better say goodbye, then.' Miss Malet took no notice of her. Feet were crunching up the gravel of the path and the novelist drew away from the window without speaking. The front door opened and there was a long-drawn, melodious whistle. Then a voice called, 'Upstairs, darling?' Miss Malet walked quickly to the sitting-room door and opened it.

'I'm here,' she said.

'Why, Sheila, darling, what's up? Aren't you——' The speaker stopped, seeing the girl in the room, standing awkwardly beside the ruins of the tea.

'I had a visitor, Cecily, an unexpected one,' said Sheila Malet. She turned back into the room. 'Come and be introduced,' she ordered the girl. 'Cecily, this is Alison Birkwell. She's going to be a writer. She sent me a story. Alison, this is a friend of mine—Miss Holmes.'

'I was just going,' muttered the girl. She shook the proffered hand, a strong, well-kept hand, lifted her eyes far enough to notice the grey, pin-stripe skirt, the heavy silk of the shirt, and then looked up quickly at the smooth, rosy cheeks under close-cropped hair. The visitor looked over Alison's head, met Miss Malet's eyes and raised her eyebrows enquiringly. There was a moment's pause and Miss Holmes's expression changed.

'What have you been up to, Sheila?' she asked pleasantly.

'Alison is just going.'

#### OVER THE PLAIN

'I hope she has enjoyed herself here. Have you enjoyed yourself, Alison?' The girl mumbled a reply.

'You hadn't by any chance forgotten I was coming, had you, Sheila my sweet?'

'It was me she'd forgotten,' said Alison quickly.

'It was I, my dear,' said Miss Holmes kindly. 'If you are going to be a writer it's as well to know the Queen's English, or am I being rather pedantic? Well, I'm sorry to break up the literary party.' She picked up her suitcase firmly and stepped into the doorway.

'Perhaps Miss Malet will ask you over again when I'm not here.' She turned to the novelist and dropped her voice a little. 'Sweetheart, do get rid of your young protégé and give me some tea.'

Alison caught the words. 'There's some made,' she began. 'At least, it ought to be fairly hot still. Miss Malet, shall I get a clean cup?'

The vast, well-tailored Miss Holmes gazed at her with mild astonishment.

'I think I should prefer a fresh pot,' she said.

'Alison, you really ought to be going.' Sheila Malet spoke in a hurried, apologetic tone. 'I don't think you should be crossing the plain in the dark, by yourself.'

'Crossing the plain? Do you live right over the other side then?' asked Miss Holmes, amiably, and held out her hand.

'At Franton,' said Miss Malet.

'I don't know it, I'm afraid. My knowledge of this part of the world is rather confined to Franbridge. I suppose that was your bicycle I saw at the gate, Alison?'

'Yes. Goodbye. I'd better be going,' said the girl, and looked past Miss Holmes's tailored shoulders to Miss Malet. 'Goodbye, Miss Malet, and thank you.'

'Goodbye,' said the novelist. 'Write some more,' she added as an afterthought.

Once outside the house, Alison turned to look back. The two women were watching her, Miss Holmes with her hand on Sheila Malet's shoulder.

'Goodbye again, Miss Malet, and thank you for the tea.'

She fumbled unhappily with the gate-latch, aware of the watching eyes. At last she pulled it open, mounted her cycle and without looking back again, pedalled as hard as she could up the lane

to the main road and out on to the open plain. Across the miles of folded uplands, their shifting colours reduced now to a uniform grey in the twilight, she could see the dark mass of hills where her home lay. The stars would be out when she was half-way across, she reckoned, and in the open their light would be sufficient to enable her to see her way. The evening air against her face stiffened the muscles and dried into crusted streaks tears which she hardly noticed she was shedding. She passed the ruins of the castle at last, a dark pool of shadow on the pale silver of the grass. Here was country comprehensible and unchanging. How different, she thought, were people from the comfortable, invariable rural scene. Miss Malet had seemed to be several people, her conversation now open and intimate, now secretive and veiled, her face first friendly, then hostile, then indifferent. But even the seasons made little alteration to the plain. Unhedged and unploughed, it gave little indication of summer or winter but preserved the same indifference under rain, wind or sun, an indifference the more remarkable because it was neither frigid nor moribund, as human indifference, but sentient, aware, receptive.

To recapture the details of the afternoon, in particular to recall the wary, inimical glances of the two women, as they stood watching her departure, became more and more difficult to Alison as she drew nearer home. She had endeavoured to retain her impressions, angry at her own youth and inexperience and determined to get at the root of her bewilderment, to find the key to a situation whose potentialities she had felt but been unable to analyse. But the impressions were already blurred. The world of the plain asserted its domination, and human relationships, never very interesting to her, lost their momentarily powerful significance and provocation. She felt as though she were travelling across an enormous lake, leaving on the shore two figures whose stature dwindled with every stroke of the oar until at last there was nothing around her in her whole line of vision but the empty, deep-blue undulations of the plain.

## The Widow Ararat

BY LORD KINROSS

MOUNT ARARAT resembles some massive widowed queen, who has lived on far beyond her time. Clad in voluminous black vestments, with white cap and shawl, the aged volcano spreads her arid loins over this corner of the earth where the frontiers of Turkey, Russia and Persia meet. Old before man was born, she broods alone with the sun and the moon over an earth in which she has lost all interest. She has known Noah and carried his ark on her shoulders; she has known Xerxes, Alexander, Antony, Alp Arslan, Tamerlane, the great conquerors of history; she will know the atom bomb and outlive it, loftily indifferent to such puny convulsions. Other mountains on this great roof of the world provide life-giving streams. Aladağ and Dumlu Dağ, her neighbours, give birth to the Euphrates, Bingöl Dağ to the Araxes, Mastar Dağ to the Tigris. But the widow Ararat is for ever sterile. Frozen beneath her cap of snow, she absorbs for her own internal nourishment all the fertilising moisture of the skies, and casts a waterless blight around her.

I found it hard not to sympathise with Tournefort<sup>1</sup> who describes Mount Ararat as 'one of the most sad and disagreeable sights upon earth.' He was given mud to drink there, but nevertheless found it preferable to the wine of the country, because at least it was iced. He declares that he saw tigers on the mountain, 'and let them pass by very respectfully.' But nobody believes him: they may have been leopards. Other travellers have given the mountain its due. Evliyá<sup>2</sup> describes it as 'one of the most praiseworthy mountains in the world'; and Ker Porter,<sup>3</sup> confronting it as 'the haven of the great ship which preserved the father of mankind from the waters of the deluge,' found himself 'lost in a strange suspension of the powers of thought.'

Ararat is the Biblical name for Urartu, the independent Kingdom of Van, of which the Armenians were the heirs. The Turks call

<sup>1</sup> M. Tournefort. *A Voyage into the Levant*. London: 1718.

<sup>2</sup> Evliyá Efendi. *Travels in Europe, Asia and Africa*. London: 1846.

<sup>3</sup> Sir R. Ker Porter. *Travels in Armenia*. London: 1821.

the mountain Ağri Dağ, the Painful Mountain ; but the Persian name for it is Koh-i-Nuh, the Mountain of Noah. The Armenian tradition that the Ark rested upon it was first derived from the Jews, who came to the country as colonists and prisoners of war. Josephus <sup>1</sup> identifies the place of the Ark's descent as Apobatyryon, the site of the modern Nakhitchewan in Soviet Armenia. He quotes the evidence of Berosus the Chaldaean that 'there is still some part of this ship in Armenia, at the mountain of the Cordyaeans ; and that some people carry off pieces of the bitumen, which they . . . use chiefly as amulets for the averting of mischiefs.' Hamilton <sup>2</sup> goes so far as to deduce a genuine Deluge, not later than Noah's epoch, from the existing shell-bed in the plains of Armenia. It may well have been here, in the fruitful region of the Araxes, that Noah, when the Flood had subsided, planted vines ; and when 'the wine was ready for use, he offered sacrifice and feasted, and being drunk, he fell asleep, and lay naked in an unseemly manner.' The site of his first vineyard—even the stalk of his first vine—was shown on the slopes of the mountain until a century ago, when it was carried away by a fall of rock. It was near the monastery of St. James, a monk who tried several times to climb to the summit, in search of the Ark. Each time he fell asleep from exhaustion on the side of the mountain, and each time he was miraculously and inconveniently transported back to his starting-point. Eventually an angel appeared to him in his sleep, assured him (incorrectly) that the mountain could not be climbed, and left him as a consolation a fragment of the Ark, which now reposes at Etchmiadzin, in the Armenian patriarchate. Curzon <sup>3</sup> debunks such 'foolish legends which disgrace the purity of our religion.' 'An attack of indigestion in an Armenian monk,' he writes, 'generally produces a vision of some nonsensical revelation about Noah's Ark, which is still supposed to remain, hidden to mortal eye, under the clouds and snows of Mount Ararat.'

An equally strong claim to have harboured the Ark is made for Cudi Dağ, a peak in the Kurdish mountains on the borders of Turkey, Syria and Iraq, where supposed fragments of it are still used by the villagers as charms for curing ailments. Moslems support this theory. Colonel Chesney, <sup>4</sup> who carried out the survey

<sup>1</sup> *Antiquities*, Book I, Chapter 3.

*Minor*. London : 1842.

<sup>2</sup> W. J. Hamilton. *Researches in Asia*

London : 1854.

<sup>3</sup> Hon. Robert Curzon. *Armenia and Erzurum*.

<sup>4</sup> Lieut.-Col. Chesney. *Expedition for the Survey of the*

*Rivers Euphrates and Tigris*. London : 1850.

#### THE WIDOW ARARAT

of the Rivers Tigris and Euphrates, confirms that Noah could easily have found pitch and gopher wood, of which the Ark was built, here in the neighbourhood of Jebel Sinjar. 'This floating habitation,' he writes, 'might have been prepared in Upper Mesopotamia, even by a single family, without any serious difficulty: the decks with the firm walls and roof braced with cross-beams, in addition to those dividing and supporting the necessary compartments, would give sufficient stability, particularly as the structure was to be floated without being launched.' Sir William Willcocks<sup>1</sup> casts his vote for Mesopotamia, farther south; and his is in a sense an expert opinion, since he was an irrigation engineer, who grew familiar with the flood habits of these regions. His view was that the Flood occurred during a season of exceptional rainfall which inundated the flat plains of the lower Euphrates and Tigris, the traditional site of the Garden of Eden, which is now flooded annually, and that Noah was marooned, not on Ararat, but on a mound at Ur of the Chaldees.

\* \* \*

The plain of Doubayazit, though a thousand feet higher, I found to be drier and hotter than that of Igdir. Ararat rose gloomily above it like a challenge, and it was obvious that I must tackle at least a part of her. After a night in the dormitory attached to a coffee-house, I was awoken by its proprietor, who sat on one of the beds examining the contents of my baggage and watching the details of my toilet with intense curiosity. If only, he said, I had arrived the day before, I could have joined a company of Turkish Alpine troops which had left at dawn to climb the mountain as part of an annual five-day exercise. Relieved to have escaped so Spartan an enterprise, I went to call on the acting Kaimakam. He was a vague, good-looking young man with a tenuous black moustache, who spoke adequate French. After ten minutes' exchange of civilities, interrupted by other calls on his time, he broke it to me gently that, in order to climb Ararat, I should need special permission from Ankara. I suggested that, if he examined his files, he would find that I had that permission. At this the Kaimakam woke up, sent for the files, and confirmed that it was so. His manner at once became less vague, and he invited me to stay with him, giving orders for my bags to be moved from the

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by E. B. Soane. *To Mesopotamia and Kurdistan in Disguise*. London: 1912.



hotel. He rang bells and made enquiries. A guide was found prepared to take us next day up to a shepherds' encampment at nine thousand feet. But he would need a rifle, in case of encounters with bears. This, said the Kaimakam, would be provided. Meanwhile we would ride in the afternoon to the old castle of Doubayazit, overlooking the plain. There we would find the commander of the garrison, who would lend us his car to visit the Persian frontier. His, unfortunately, was the only vehicle available.

The border fortress of Doubayazit, once a stronghold of the Kurds, is today a featureless flat cantonment, with wide dusty parade-grounds where Turkish troops were digging trenches, pitching tents, firing weapons and going through the various motions of infantry training. We rode out of it across the bare pink plain towards a pink ridge rising above it. Resting for a while in an orchard with a Seljuk gateway, the property of a *Haji* who fed us with small sweet apples, we proceeded upwards to the crags where the town of Bayazid once stood, commanding before it the plain and behind it a mountain road into Persia. They presented a scene of desolation. On a spur above a dried-up stream stood a ruined pink fortress, barely distinguishable from the rocks on which it stood. Here man had collaborated effectively with nature for the purposes of defence, completing and supplementing with her own stone the bastions which nature had raised, filling in here a gap in one of her ramparts, building there a tower to balance one of her pinnacles. It was a triumph of functional military architecture, built with a keen eye to camouflage, according to the strategic demands of the Middle Ages. High upon the rock was a giant figure carved in relief in the Assyrian style. For the original fortress dates from the period of the Urartu Kings, and its rocks display cuneiform inscriptions. Beneath it, by the banks of the stream, was a ruined mosque, perhaps of the Seljuk period, its dome and minaret similarly harmonising with the colours and contours of the rock.

On the opposite bank of the stream were more recent scenes of devastation. Towering above it, not arising from its environment but imposed ostentatiously upon it, were the ruins of an elaborate feudal palace. Just who built it and when, it is not quite clear. My guide said a certain Ishak Pasha, an Ottoman, early in the nineteenth century; Fraser,<sup>1</sup> visiting it in 1838, said a certain

<sup>1</sup> J. B. Fraser. *A Winter's Journey from Constantinople to Teheran*. London: 1838.

#### THE WIDOW ARARAT

Ishak Pasha—a Kurd, presumably, since he was the grandfather of the reigning Pasha—in the eighteenth century and Texier also dates it from this period ; Mr. Seton Lloyd <sup>1</sup> says a certain Ishak Pasha, an Ottoman, in the seventeenth century. Whenever he lived, whether Ottoman or Kurd, this Ishak Pasha was clearly a man of flamboyant architectural taste. The style of his palace is Seljuk Revival. Its exterior is forbidding enough. But inside the austerity of the early Seljuk Turkish conquerors has been forgotten and the Pasha, with all the exuberance of a latter-day potentate, has indulged in a baroque profusion of their more Persian decorative fancies. His palace is a lavish and engaging Seljuk swan song.

Today its walls and courtyards were pitted with shell-holes. I asked the Kaimakam who was responsible for this destruction, and received the stock reply : the Russians, during the first world war. In view of its key position on the frontier it may well have been destroyed, by one side or the other, during the fierce fighting of 1915 and afterwards. But it has seen fighting since then, which the Turks, now that peace reigns, not unnaturally prefer to forget. For the country is a stronghold of the Kurds : the Kurtie of the Assyrians, Karduchi of Xenophon, Corduene and Cyrti of the Romans ; that race descended, according to the Jews, from four hundred virgins deflowered by devils on the way to Solomon's court ; that proud, wild Highland race whose periodic revolts recalled those other Highland disturbances of the '15 and the '45. Doubayazit, not by any means for the first time, was a centre of one of these revolts, in 1930. Hence, presumably, those more modern ruins beneath the palace, extending to abandoned terraces and irrigation canals, and suggesting that the hillside, and even the plain beneath it, were until recently well cultivated.

The Kaimakam was evasive on this subject, and led me away from the ruins, up the hill, to a Kurdish tomb where, albeit a Turk and the servant of a secular state, he knelt and murmured a few appropriate phrases from the Koran. It was the tomb of a famous Kurdish scholar, Ahmed Khani, who gave Bayazid (as it was then) an honoured name in the Islamic world of the late sixteenth century. The Kurdish language is more spoken than written, but Ahmed Khani put it on paper, providing his race with some of its rare literature. He wrote poetry, philosophy and religious works. He ran a school at which Kurds could learn their own language, after they had learnt their Koran, and wrote a rhymed vocabulary for

<sup>1</sup> Seton Lloyd, in the *Listener*. 11th June, 1953.

LORD KINROSS

them : Arabic into Kurdish, Semitic into Aryan. It contained two thousand words, beginning with the admonition :

If your grammar and lessons you fail to construe  
No fame and renown is in store for you.<sup>1</sup>

\* \* \*

There was no sign of the promised car to take us to the Persian frontier, nor indeed of any military commander. So we rode back again to Doubayazit. As we reached the town the Kaimakam said hopefully that he presumed I would now be too tired to attempt Ararat in the morning. I was sorry to disappoint him. I should, it is true, have enjoyed a rest before dinner, but as there was no bed in my bedroom this proved impossible. The Kaimakam's idea of a rest was to change into his best suit and walk me for an hour, in a procession of two, up and down the centre of the town's two streets. During the promenade, emissaries approached us from the pavement, and were despatched on various errands : one to borrow a bed for me from the Mayor, another to see about the horses for tomorrow, another to fetch the guide, who after an altercation finally refused to take us, since the Kaimakam had not produced the promised rifle. Outside a garrison club the plump wives of officers sat with their babies, in groups apart from their husbands. The streets were treeless but for a line of young acacias of which all but three, outside the *Vilayet*, had been destroyed by the inhabitants for firewood. A child was breaking off one of the last, and the Kaimakam stopped to deliver her a mild rebuke. But his attention was caught more urgently by a chair left outside the *Halkevi*, which was Government property and might be stolen. He gave peremptory orders for its removal and walked on, while the child waited with a patient smile to finish off the tree. Far up in the night sky a star was signalling in morse. The Alpinists had reached the snow-line.

Next day, in the company of the Kaimakam, I climbed half of Mount Ararat on a cab-horse : or so, from the positions of its sores and the fact that it wore blinkers, I took it to be. The Kaimakam had a handsome stallion, lent to him by the Gendarmerie, but to my relief did not offer it to me. I felt safe on my cab-horse, though it had an unsettling habit of trotting for twenty paces, then walking for a hundred, monotonously, all across the weary plain. When we reached the foot of the mountain it stopped altogether, obliging

<sup>1</sup> E. B. Soane. *ibid.*

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me to walk. There was a police-post here, its roof held down with ropes and stones, lest it blow off in the winter gales. The Kaimakam now rode ahead, with a gendarme who had taken the place of the unarmed guide. I followed on foot with the owner-driver of the cab-horse and its companion of the shafts. We picked our way laboriously upwards in the haze through untidy heaps of black volcanic boulders. All the rock of the mountain was this unrelieved black, and its only vegetation was a grass, the colour of a dead man's hair. There was no breath of air, and no sign of movement beyond that of an occasional hawk or buzzard.

Towards midday we reached a stretch of rough pasture, where some Kurdish shepherds had pitched their spreading, dark brown tents. It was good to rest in the shade of one of them, lying on rosebud cretonne cushions and a sheep's wool rug, with bright *Kilims* thrown over walls of latticed straw. The shepherd's wife and daughter brought us *ayran*, the cool sour milk of the mountains, followed by glasses of tea, while grandmother watched us from a corner, busy at her wool-work. They wore that early Victorian costume which the Kurds must have evolved long before us and have seen no reason to change: pigtails, layers of flounced petticoats, balloon sleeves and bloomers in gay flowered cretonnes: clothes with a form of their own, to veil the imperfections of the human form. Only the kerchiefs over the head, and the blue beads and cowrie shells, threaded into the pigtails, struck a note which would have seemed outlandish to our grandmothers.

This was one of the twenty-four tribal 'villages' to which the mountain allows a parsimonious living. Here seven families owned, between them, twenty-five oxen and a few sparse fields of barley, living largely on *yoghurt* and black barley bread.

"We are poor," said the shepherd. "Sometimes we go for ten days without food. We even eat grass."

Poor they certainly were. But there was a hyperbolical Kurdish twinkle in his eye. Perhaps, he said, I would like to try the grass; and a soft cheese was brought, mashed together with sweet herbs of the mountainside.

Speaking through the Kaimakam, the shepherd said to me: "You look like a Kurd."

I assumed innocence, and asked: "What is a Kurd like?"

"You know very well what the Kurd is like. He is a man who lives to fight."

"And the Turk?"

The shepherd replied. The Kaimakam interpreted, "He says that Kurd and Turk are the same."

From the expression in the shepherd's eyes I wondered whether this was just what he had said. I changed to the safer subject of bears. Were there many on the mountain?

There were, he said. He knew a man who had been found dead on the mountainside. There was blood on his knife, but no trace of blood on his body; only the claw-marks of strangulation. Then he produced a bear-skin, grey and rather moth-eaten, and told its story. He had come upon the bear on a mountain-path. The boy with him was frightened, and ran away. But he rode up boldly towards the bear. He was a sophisticated shepherd, and described the scene with appropriate gestures. The bear did not move; he reached it and drew his knife. Still the bear did not move. He was about to strike—when he saw that it was a dead bear. Perhaps it had been killed by a companion. Perhaps it had fallen and broken its neck. Who could tell? The shepherd, with an urbane gesture, took out a silvered tobacco box, and offered me a rolled cigarette. Encouraged by his tales for travellers, I asked him about Noah and his Ark, said to be lodged on a spur of the mountain called the Nail. But he was not to be drawn: he did not know that neighbourhood. Ark stories are perhaps the preserve of other tribes. They are sure to be convincing.

The Kaimakam and I brought out our luncheon. I opened a tin of stuffed peppers and offered it to him. But he refused. He was a Moslem, he explained, and would not eat oil. I studied the topography of the mountain. To the south was Little Ararat, its prototype in miniature. Until 1930 it was in Persian territory, and a threat to Turkey, for it harboured rebel Kurds, who were continually reinforced through Persia. After the Kurdish revolt of this period the frontier was altered, and Turkey got Little Ararat in exchange for a stretch of country farther south. The Turks still complain of an unruly Persian frontier. But, being in possession of Little Ararat, they are better able to keep an eye on Persian trespassers, and their own Kurds are now quiet. To the east, the Kaimakam pointed out the *Ventre Dechirée*, a swelling slope of the mountain, below the shoulder of the Nail. I asked him whether any trees grew on the mountain, and he said there were poplars in a village, whose name he told me, on the northern slope. I asked him the name of the tribe which was entertaining us. It was the Keçi Alan. I began to make some notes. Suddenly the

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Kaimakam grew suspicious. Ararat, he said, was a military area : these names were all secret. I must strike out of my notebook the name of the village with the trees. I did so willingly. I must strike out the *Ventre Dechirée*. But I did not feel that this was necessary.

From now onwards the manner of the Kaimakam changed. Despite the flies, I would have gladly spent the afternoon in this comforting atmosphere of Victorian domesticity, with the girl swinging her petticoats, and the mother sitting tranquilly, and the grandmother pegging away at her wool-work in the corner. But he was restless. Though it was not yet two o'clock we must leave. I rose reluctantly. On the way down the mountain he said he might have to go that evening to Karaköse, my next destination, to see his *Vali*. We could go together. I said I was in no hurry, and would prefer to go tomorrow. The Kaimakam rode ahead to the foot of the mountain. Hot and thirsty, I found him by a reedy, ice-cool spring where a dead tree raised hieratic branches over Kurdish girls at their laundry. Here was one of the few spots where water contrived to seep right through the mountain and emerge beneath, feeding mosquito-infested ponds and a meagre stream, the Sari Su, or Yellow Water, which rose elsewhere and ran to join the Araxes. I bathed in the spring, then lay on the turf beside it and asked for tea. But the Kaimakam had drunk the whole of my thermos : an act unheard of at an English picnic. I at once began to yearn for tea, and suggested that we should continue our journey. But the Kaimakam, who seemed to have forgotten Karaköse, was now in no hurry and would prefer to wait a while. After an hour or so we started for home. The Kaimakam galloped across the plain, and was soon out of sight. My cab-horse followed him with its shambling stride. Thirsty after an hour's ride, I asked the cabman for the water-bottle. He raised it first to his lips, then spat out the water.

"It's *pis*," he said—an expressive word for dirty.

Longing now for water, as well as tea, I walked the last hour into Doubayzit, mounting only as we passed the barracks, in order to save the faces of horse and cabman. I found the Kaimakam sitting in the schoolhouse, with the schoolmaster, and demanded first water, then tea. It was comforting to relax, even on the hard upright chair which is all that Anatolia provides. Eventually, when his servant appeared with the key, we went back to the Kaimakam's house. I took off my boots and lay down on my



bed, somewhat surprised but little caring that the bedding had been removed. The Kaimakam interrupted my rest. My bedding, he regretted, had been returned to the Mayor. He had been able to borrow it for one night only. I should have to move back to the hotel. I protested. I was tired. I preferred to stay here, bedding or no bedding. I could make myself comfortable somehow.

"No, no," said the Kaimakam. "You cannot. That would be a shameful thing for me." He left the room in some agitation.

So to save my host shame I must repack my bags and move back to the dormitory. The truth was slow to dawn on my tired wits. I had become, of course, a suspect—not surprisingly in this tense frontier area—and the Kaimakam wanted nothing more to do with me. So be it; but I did not intend to hurry. The servant came in at intervals, pointed to the door, and said roughly: "Hotel!" Taking my time I dressed and, intending to dine first, went out to the eating house, leaving my baggage. Enjoying the situation after a bottle of red wine, I collected a small boy, and returned to the house to pack my bags. There was no sign of the Kaimakam or of his servant, and the bed had been hidden in a corner, behind a screen, for fear that I might try to sleep in it. I made the boy carry my bag ostentatiously down the centre of the street, thus advertising my change of address. I passed the Kaimakam, sitting with friends outside the eating-house, and bade him a formal farewell. Then, somewhat nervously in view of my status as a suspect, I approached the coffee-house. But a cordial welcome from the proprietor reassured me, and my bags were carried to the dormitory. I sat down to carouse on tea and coffee with a party of his clients, who greeted me with friendliness. The Kaimakam had improved the comedy by planting his spies around me. The schoolmaster sat rather glumly in a corner, watching our revelry. A pale man in a soft hat inspected me periodically through a window, and withdrew to report. At the next table sat an earnest corporal of gendarmerie. I invited him to our table where he would have heard my remarks more easily, but he refused with some embarrassment. Finally, when I felt that enough face had been saved—though whether for myself or the Kaimakam, I shall never know for certain—I retired to bed, and the corporal, closing his notebook, did likewise in the room next door.

The windows of the dormitory were hermetically closed, an effective but oppressive method of keeping out mosquitoes. My

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companions were sociable: a travelling photographer, a lorry-driver and two soldiers. One of them was leaving tomorrow for Korea, to the outspoken envy of his companion, who was not included in the draft. He promised that he would kill ten Koreans single-handed. The photographer had been working late, taking last-minute likenesses of departing heroes, with their families. My companions talked until their words turned to snores. They were still snoring soundly when I rose in the morning, to catch the bus for Karaköse. The lurking corporal saw me on to it, then disappeared. It was of British make, and a small boy in the crowd remarked, with startling venom, that all British lorries were '*pis*.' In the light of morning I found it hard to bear the Kaimakam ill will. He was merely a cautious but out-of-date young man: the victim of a bureaucracy, taught in the past—though no longer—to treat the foreigner with suspicion. Thus he covered himself both ways. If I was all right, I had stayed in his house. If I was not, I had not. Who was he, after all, to acquit me of espionage?

\* \* \*

Shedding the emanations of Ararat, I breathed a freer air. We climbed upwards and away from its fetid arena into the orbit of a more generous range. Presently a fresh blue stream was racing along beside us, no longer to the east but to the west. It was the infant Euphrates, the Murat, the River of Desire, destined to grow into a great sprawling monster and to cast up these waters into the Persian Gulf. From the dead end of the Persian frontier we were moving back into the main stream of Anatolian life. The land displayed its prosperous economy as in a pictorial diagram: so many peasants, so many animals, so many tractors, so many stacks of wheat, all visible at a glance and adding up to a nice statistical total. This, in reverse, was the 'transit' road whose birth I had seen at Trebizondi. It was also a likely supporting route for a Russian invasion. As we approached Karaköse, it was alive with midday traffic, and the town proved to be an army base, with modern barrack buildings and above all a modern 'Transit Hotel.'

I approached the authorities with diffidence, in case some suspicious report from the Kaimakam had preceded me. The Chief of Police was square and formidable, but he greeted me with benevolence and, while we awaited an interpreter, was soon asking me in Turkish how many babies I had at home. My negative answer seemed genuinely to distress him, and he gave me a smile

of profound compassion. He then took me to the *Vali*, a polished man with quick, intelligent eyes, whose welcome was equally friendly. In the evening, moreover, the *Vali*, the Chief of Police, the Commander of the Gendarmerie and the Attorney-General came together to call and drink tea with me on the terrace of the Transit Hotel, thus rehabilitating me in the eyes of the world. I decided to say nothing of the Kaimakam's eccentric behaviour, and we were presently talking in grown-up fashion about Kurds and other equally sensitive subjects.

Most of the Transit Hotel had been taken over by four American colonels, complete with their NCO's and Cypriot interpreters, who had come to train detachments of the Turkish Army. They had made themselves at home, as only Americans can, in hotel bedrooms, and entertained me lavishly with tumblers of Bourbon whisky. Their weapons hung on the walls, providing an agreeable touch of modern decoration, and packing-cases full of canned and bottled foods lay piled at the foot of their beds. They had dogs, and radios, and photographs of glamorous wives. It was interesting to see these clean new Barbarians from the West, removed from their native urban element. All were seasoned men who had fought in many parts of the world—the Aleutian Islands, Burma, Normandy, Yugoslavia—and had long stories to tell of its strange inhabitants. The only inconvenience in their way of life was that the stories began before dinner instead of after it, with the result that there was no dinner.

This race, without a peasantry, was slowly becoming civilised by Asiatic peasant standards. Though they had been here only a few months, they were already taking Kurd and Turk for granted, surprised by the cleanliness of their houses, impressed by their good treatment of horses, accepting philosophically their rougher treatment of dogs. They observed, almost with equanimity, the earthy spectacle of dung mixed with grain on the threshing floors, and the resulting peculiar flavour of 'Guernsey bread.' They went shooting at week-ends and had discovered that it was easier to kill wild turkeys from bullock-carts than from jeeps, since the birds disregarded them; and they were looking forward to shooting wolves in the streets in winter, from the upper windows of the Transit Hotel. One of the colonels came in, glowing with health and approval, from his first Turkish bath. It is true that they had not yet learnt to abandon their native iced water for the precious cool nectar of the Turkish springs, nor to judge, as the Turks do,

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the subtle bouquets of the local vintage waters. One of the colonels, however, had tried to persuade his fellows to build for the unit a mud-brick house in the practical peasant style, instead of commandeering the hotel.

"But I am afraid," he said sadly, "that we Americans are too fond of our plumbing."

His tone was almost apologetic: a hopeful sign that even this addiction might some day be overcome.

The departure of my bus for Erzurum, the next morning, was delayed by the fact that its two front seats had been sold to four separate people, including myself. My own claim, fortunately, was given priority, as it was found to be physically impossible to fit my legs into the row behind. We drove through a rolling golden landscape, shot here and there with green, and patterned with scabious, blue thistles, Michaelmas daisies and other familiar herbaceous plants. Tawny, leonine hills crouched around us as we crossed the last span of the Ararat range and returned into the wide Araxes valley. Here was an elegant bridge, with six pointed arches, built by the great sixteenth-century architect Sinan, who was once a military engineer in these Eastern provinces. We crossed the river and were on the main military road from Kars to Erzurum. The driver of the bus, a boy of sixteen in a shirt of hunting tartan, trod on the accelerator and leant forward over the wheel, closing his eyes in an adolescent ecstasy of wailing song. Since he was too young to have a driving licence, we dropped him at Pasinlar, the last stage before Erzurum, and took on board a maturer colleague. The valley narrowed and the mountains from either side stretched arms across to close it, in defence of Erzurum. The downland was as thickly scarred with camps and barracks as Salisbury Plain in wartime, and moreover honeycombed with invisible defences. Troops in battle-dress drilled and trained and manœuvred in the fierce Asiatic sunshine, with an array of tanks and guns and armoured vehicles fit to arouse the greenest envy of the British Army. We drove into Erzurum through a tunnel in a grass-grown earth wall, dating from the Crimean War.

I turned to my neighbour, a young French-speaking diplomat on his military service, who had persuaded me to give him lessons in English throughout the journey.

"It looks a big town," I said.

He laughed scornfully. "You mean a big village."

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